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THE  
DIVINE ADVENTURE

THEODORE MAYNARD

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## **THE DIVINE ADVENTURE**



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# THE DIVINE ADVENTURE

A NOVEL

BY

THEODORE MAYNARD

*Author of "Poems," "The Last Knight," etc.*

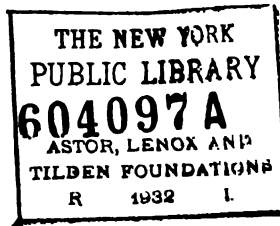


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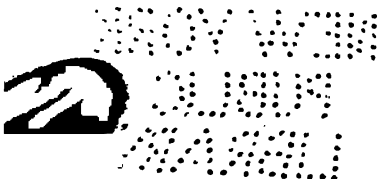
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## PART I



# THE DIVINE ADVENTURE

## CHAPTER I

**T**HE instant prayers were over, John, carefully muffling a sigh of relief, slipped out into the garden. Prayers not only tired but tortured him, for he knew perfectly well that after Aunt Angela and Aunt Agnes had approached the Mercy Seat in turn they expected him to pray. He never did, and his failure to follow on with his petitions was the cause of so awkward a silence, so many mute reproaches in the eyes of the others, that the best thing to do was to clear out of the room at once.

John always made the garden his city of refuge whenever the weather was fine; if not, he sought the seclusion of his bedroom until the secular business of the day had properly begun. The garden, however, was much the better place, for the maid would be sure to want to make his bed and clean his room if he went upstairs.


The air was already pleasantly drowsy with the promise of heat and the sky thinly cast about with haze. It was just the time to lie in the hammock slung between two mulberry trees. By swinging to and fro there was a strong probability of eventually working

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up sufficient momentum to shake down mulberries. Sometimes John managed by a lucky fluke to catch one in his mouth. That was the object of the game, but even when it was incompletely attained berries would fall on the lawn. If any complaints were made about the disappearance of the fruit John would be able to declare truthfully that he had only eaten what he had found on the ground.

On this morning, however, in spite of the fact that • the mulberries appeared to be larger, more numerous and riper than ever before—the gentlest swing would be practically certain to bring some down—the boy dared not move in the hammock. His aunts were still in the dining room and could see him perfectly through the French windows. So he lay motionless, thinking how glad he was that prayers were over and that the weather was going to hold, and wondering how soon there would be nobody to watch him.

He did not look very sanctified as he lay basking in the morning sun, and waiting for his aunts' eyes to be turned away. He was not sanctified, or he would have relished prayer. There had been a time, after he and his sister Marjorie came to live at Dorking, when they were prayed for by name every morning. It was to make them feel that they were sinners, most conspicuously miserable sinners. But after they had grown accustomed to being thought wicked they gradually came to take their outcast condition as a matter of course; until they were badgered into professing conversion, when they discovered to their horror, too late, that though there was no longer any need for them to be prayed for or prayed at, they were evidently expected to suffer a much worse thing, the active personal participation in praying.



The shock very nearly threw them back into the godless state from which they had just emerged. Marjorie was let off lightly, for it was known that her turn came after John's, and he never took his. Once he did try very hard, but broke down completely in the middle of the second sentence. Nothing would induce him to make the attempt in public again. There was always a tense pause at the end of Aunt Agnes' prayer while they waited for him in a spirit of holy disappointment. His inability in this matter and his distaste for the Bible reading, which was supposed to be the second mark of his saved state, made his aunts rather dubious about the actuality of their nephew having "found the Lord."

John did not care. He much preferred to find mulberries. Aunt Angela would go into the kitchen soon and then he could shake the trees. There was a fine fat berry just overhead which would almost certainly drop into his mouth the moment he began to swing from side to side.

And yet, despite his present occupation and his permanent distaste for formal family prayers, the boy lying in the hammock was not so regardless of God as his aunts supposed. The deeply set eyes that gave a wistful charm to his face suggested a mystic; the lines of his mouth and chin were those of one who might be a fanatic. But Aunt Angela thought his dreamy eyes indicated laziness and his strong face sullenness. She did not know that a spiritual impulse was stirring within him (though it had not grown conscious of itself) or that its partial repression was due to her methods. His mind did not question her arid creed; his heart had already begun its lonely divine adventure.

It was the end of the Summer holidays, and for seven

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weeks there had been, in addition to piety, petty and continual correction. If he lay on the settee Aunt Angela would be sure to hunt him out and ask him if he couldn't find something to do. She hated to see "young limbs idle." There *was* nothing to do. He was not allowed the companionship of other boys, and cricket even with Marjorie and a soft ball was forbidden in the garden. Aunt Angela censored his reading; only yesterday she took away "The Three Musketeers" and substituted Samuel Smiles' "Self-Help." John loathed the smugly self-sufficient heroes of industrialism and sighed in vain for Porthos, Athos and Aramis.

He dimly realized that Aunt Angela had given him Smiles to read with a practical object, as a preparation for the change that was to be made in his life. Last June he became seventeen and it was time for him to be putting fortune to the test. There was to be no more school for him.

School, however, though bad enough in its way, was preferable to the only home John knew; a home that was, apart from Marjorie, choked with a benighted boredom. At school one was freer; for despite the fact that he was not popular with the boys because of his attitude towards games or with the masters because of his attitude towards exams—neither of which institutions he could treat with the due degree of solemnity—school meant a release from the spiritual confinement of home. That was something.

His father and mother were killed in the railway smash on the Great Eastern in 1901 and one result of the disaster was the passing of the children into the hands of their aunts. Wilfred Bradley had been a Civil servant, a talented and humorous man; his wife

an easy-going, good-natured woman who, according to the principles of the art of compromise she practiced, at once deferred to her husband's mild ironical agnosticism by giving the children no religious instruction and conformed to custom by taking them occasionally to morning service on Sunday. She tried hard to be broad-minded, but the problem proved puzzling to her vague character.

The railway accident solved the problem for her; as a result of it the two children were brought up by her elder sisters, Angela and Agnes Storer. These ladies accepted the upbringing of Marjorie and John as a sacred duty—sternly sacred, like all the duties they acknowledged.

Angela Storer had always been of a serious disposition. Having gained salvation and a little later a conviction in the truth of Meltonianism, the only denominational system which appeared to her as being fully "scriptural," she set herself with determination to the task of bringing Agnes to the light. As Agnes was already piously disposed, she readily submitted her unforceful character, then and ever afterwards, to the impress of her sister's mind, the guidance of her sister's will.

For many years they had strictly adhered to Meltonianism, which communion, as the reader should know, is an offshoot from the "Peculiar People," who are often, though erroneously, confused with the "Particular People" and the "Peculiar Baptists." Their more faithful interpretation of II Cor. ii, 12 & 13, marked them off from the first-named sect; and though there was not much at issue with the "Peculiar Baptists," Isaiah certainly clearly tells us that the Lord's people are a peculiar people, and never so much as



mentions the word Baptist. Meltonians did not renounce the official use of the title "Peculiar People," but accepted for convenience the nick-name popularly bestowed upon them. It was derived from the name of their founder, Simpson Melton, who had led them during an heroic struggle with the main body on the question of the exact date of the Second Coming of Christ. All this was very confusing to Marjorie and John, but they decided between themselves that the Lord's people *are* a peculiar people—only too often a very peculiar people indeed—and let the matter go at that. They did not yet realize that virulence in conflict among the various Protestant bodies is in inverse proportion to the importance of the subject of their quarrel.

No attempt seemed to be being made to move out of the dining-room. There was evidently a discussion going on about one of the morning's letters. Meanwhile the mulberries were *so* tempting.

At last Marjorie came through the open window and walked across the lawn to the end of the garden where her brother was lying. The deep rare gold of her hair gleamed and glittered in the light, setting off the clear healthy color of her complexion and contrasting with the dark brown of John's uncombed head and the pallor of his face. In the girl's eyes there was little of the mystery which lightly but distinctly touched the boy's. Though slender, she carried about her a gracious and maternal atmosphere. She could not have been called beautiful if judged by strict or classical canons, for there was a piquant irregularity about her features. But this flaw was an added attraction, creating the impression of personality and increasing the warm radiant effect of loveliness she produced.

As she strolled across the grass which shimmered in the summer haze, John lazily lifted his head an inch or two from the cushion on which it reclined and saluted her with casual affection.

"Hullo, old Marjorie! You've been a long time. What's up in there?"

Marjorie, looking very cool in her white muslin dress, came up to him and sat down under the mulberry tree. As she leant against its trunk the weight of her body shook down a mulberry. "I know that's what you've been wanting," she said, laughing, and handing her brother the fallen fruit.

There was an unusual sympathy between these two, for Marjorie had long ago constituted herself as John's mother and, as far as it was possible to her, his brother. The quiet understanding love, even more perhaps the loyal companionship she offered, had succeeded in saving him from the sullen temper which otherwise would almost certainly have soured his heart in the uncongenial, undiscerning household at Dorking.

"A letter has come for you, John—at least a letter about you."

"Oh, what was it?" he asked, sucking the mulberry.

"From some builders in London—friends of Aunt Angela's—who are ready to take you into their office."

"Do they think of letting me go?"

"Oh, yes," Marjorie answered. "That's what they've been talking about in there. They think it's such a splendid chance for you. Meltonians, you know," she added in the weary tone with which she and John spoke of their coreligionists.

John did not seem particularly joyous at the news of his prospective employers' orthodoxy, but he did feel pleased to hear that he could go out into the world

and begin a man's life. Marjorie went on again, after a pause:

"There's something else I haven't told you before, John. As I knew you were going to leave home I decided to go away as well. I would never have done so while you were alone here with no one to look after you. It doesn't matter now. I've been trying to get a job for myself. I didn't want to tell you about it until everything was settled. A letter for me arrived this morning as well as one for you. Funny, wasn't it, that they should both come together? A lady whose sister was at school with mother has offered me a position as governess to her children. She lives in France and is married to a Frenchman. She is a Protestant, so of course Aunt Angela can't object to my going."

Just then Aunt Angela called through the window, "John, and you too, Marjorie, come in here. We want to talk to you."

Miss Angela Storer's chief fault was an intolerance born of her acute consciousness of spiritual superiority, and her chief characteristic a domineering manner born of her sense of spiritual responsibility. She ruled her younger sister Agnes so effectively that her failure with John's soul was inexplicable upon any theory except that of his cussedness! These two ladies were both kindly enough at heart, but they had trained themselves to regard tenderness as a weakness, and never having married, or as far as anyone could suppose, having even been in love, did not understand children. Nor did they understand that their nephew had ceased to be a child. Agnes had sometimes made ill-advised attempts at sympathy; but these were so misconstrued by John and so sharply suppressed by Angela as to make the boy's condition if possible worse than before.

He had come to accept his aunts as the controllers of his destiny, beings that appeared in his eyes as capricious, if not actually cruel, despots.

In this John was unjust, for though they irritated him and were irritated by him, they loved him and had made many sacrifices on his behalf and on that of Marjorie. Wilfred Bradley had left only about five hundred pounds to his children, and the remainder of the cost of their upbringing and education had been supplied out of the not too well filled purse of the Storers, who were practicing many little economies in order to fit their charges for life. If they tormented them with an unlovely religion, they did so in the firm assurance that it was a matter of overwhelming urgency.

Aunt Angela waited for her niece and nephew as they walked across the garden to the house. Importance was written over her, priestly in the gold brooch at her throat engraved with "Mizpah," and domestic in the bunch of keys hanging at her belt. Her tone of voice was clear, sharp and decided, and each of her jerky movements showed nervous energy. She was dressed in a plain dull gray, useful for housework and incidentally symbolical of the lowly spirit of the elect.

Aunt Agnes was also dressed in gray, not because she liked the color, or was desirous of being ostentatiously lowly, but because her sister ordered it. She also wore a brooch of gold, engraved with "Mizpah," but carried no marks of authority either in keys at her waist or decision in her face. She was a woman of about forty-five, rather stouter and grayer than her elder sister. Her voice, in pitch though not in tone, singularly like that of Angela, was nervous, not with energy but with fear of saying or doing the wrong thing. She was sitting at the end of the breakfast table as John and

Marjorie entered the room. The stage was set for an official pronouncement!

John slithered into an armchair and curled himself up comfortably in spite of the reproof in Aunt Angela's eyes. Any other morning the reproof of his indolence would have been uttered; he knew that on this occasion he might use the interest his position gave him to take a liberty. Aunt Angela drew a letter from its envelope, and began:

"We have just received a letter from Mr. Wainwright. He is a builder in Golders Green, and I am glad to say a very godly man."

Here she looked meaningfully at her nephew and sniffed a little to indicate a doubt of her nephew's godliness. Continuing, she said, "He offers to be a father to you and to see that you don't fall into any of the dangers so rife in London. There is a large Meltonian Chapel at Golders Green, of which Mr. Wainwright is a deacon, where the pure gospel is preached every Sunday. That will be a great blessing for you, John."

The boy remained unmoved by the prospects of a pure gospel, and waited patiently for the business matter which he knew the letter must contain. When Aunt Angela read out that John was to receive fifteen shillings a week at the start and would have plenty of opportunities for getting on in the office of Willow and Wainwright, everyone present thought his fortune was secure, for they were simple in worldly affairs. To John such munificence appeared as compensation for the threatened "godliness." His aunt went on to tell him that she would allow him another fifteen shillings every week, upon which allowance and his salary he must learn to subsist. She concluded her speech and waited for him to reply.

He had been listening in silence, but with an internal excitement that he deemed it best to conceal. Aunt Angela was being generous; he could hardly be so ungracious as to exhibit all the delight he experienced at hearing that he was to escape from her thralldom. But his words were quite sincere:

"It's awfully good of you, Aunt Angela, to do all this for me. Of course I'd like to go. . . . I say!" he went on, blushing a little at himself, "it's frightfully decent of you to make me that allowance."

Even then Angela Storer could not unbend. The bones of her spirit had grown too stiff. So she answered in a way that chilled a good deal of John's warmth of feeling—though her intention was good—"You must keep *inside* the allowance, mind! It is ample, and I shall want to know how you spend your money."

Agnes murmured the habitual assent she gave to her sister's utterances, and the speaker, encouraged by the support she had expected, continued:

"Mr. Wainwright will see that you don't get into mischief. I have every confidence in him, and you will be working among Meltonians at Golders Green."

John did not affect an enthusiasm he did not possess. He avoided that aspect of the case and after a momentary pause, asked instead:

"How soon am I to begin?"

His aunt noticed his indifference to her allusion to godly society, and though it pained her, she answered his question:

"In a month's time. . . . That brings me to another point, I expect Marjorie has told you that she has been offered a good position in France—among Protestants, or I wouldn't consent to her going.

Madame Crechet—she was at school with your mother—is not a Meltonian, but she is not a Catholic, thank God! . . . I hope, Marjorie, that when you see the corruption of Rome at close quarters, you will be driven by it to a deeper spirituality.”

Aunt Angela rose, jingled her bunch of keys with an air of authority, and said, “Well, you’re both very fortunate; try to be worthy of your good fortune.”

The official consultation was at an end.

## CHAPTER II

**E**XACTLY a month later, to the very day, almost to the very hour at which Mr. Wainwright’s letter arrived (Aunt Angela was nothing if not a precisian), John Bradley pushed open for the first time the entrance door to the office of Messrs. Willow & Wainwright, and stepped into a new world.

He had been told to present himself at nine o’clock, and a few minutes before the hour struck, arrived neatly dressed in new clothes and full of mingled excitement and shyness. Evidently he was expected, for a stoutish, fine, florid, middle-aged man burst out from a small room upon the ground floor upon hearing his footsteps, and asked:

“Are you Mr. Bradley?”

John plucked up heart. This man, though brusque, was evidently kindly; so he answered cheerfully that he was John Bradley, and that he wanted to see Mr. Wainwright.

“Upstairs. Prayers,” he added with a faint sarcasm,

"will be in a few minutes; but Mr. Wainwright would like to see you before they begin. Go up. It's the door facing the top of the stairs."

In that room were two men engaged at the occupation they described as "keeping their noses to the grindstone." One of them sat at his desk immersed in a pile of blue prints and making now and then abstruse calculations upon a scrap of paper; while the other stood by the window, reading a letter. The man at the desk looked up.

"We've got good stuff here, Willow; with these new designs we can save quite twenty pounds upon each of our houses, and sell them at not a penny less than they've been fetching up to now. What do you think of that, my buck?"

Mr. Willow put down the letter which he had been pretending to understand, and said, "That's splendid! When shall we start?"

Mr. Wainwright stroked his capacious stomach with satisfaction, and replied, "Why, at once. There are three people coming to see about houses to-day. I'm practically certain to collar two of them."

"But supposing they prefer the old sort?"

"Pauh! You leave that to me. When they've heard me talk they'll actually think I'm giving them a favor in saving twenty pounds for myself. After all, it's business. If we can cut our costs that's no reason why we should cut our profits. They must pay us for our brains. . . . We ought to have a good day, Willow," he added in a different tone, "two of those people—the two I am counting on—are Meltonians."

At this moment John knocked very timidly at the door and was bidden to enter. He came into the room,



not so nervously that he was unable to take in its details. Upon its bright distempered walls were hung colored drawings or black and white plans of some of the houses erected on the estate. Over the mantelpiece was a design of Willow and Wainwright's masterpiece, the famous local Meltonian chapel. At one end of the room was the text "The Lord will provide," and at the other, "We know in Whom we have believed." Worldly business men frequently display mottoes indicative of their commercial spirit. Cards are strewn about with screeds such as "Be Brief," or "This is our Busy Day," but Willow & Wainwright let it be known that their trust was in God, and that for His glory and not only for personal pecuniary profit did the staff "keep their noses to the grindstone." Willow, Wainwright & Jehovah, Ltd., might have been startling as the designation of the firm; it would not have been inaccurate.

As soon as Mr. Wainwright saw John standing in the room he advanced from his desk to meet him.

"John Bradley, I suppose? How are you, my boy?"

John thanked him, and answered that he was very well.

"That's right, that's right. Ready for work, eh? This is Mr. Willow," and Mr. Wainwright indicated the gentleman who had been fidgeting about the room, as was his wont, trying very hard to appear occupied.

Mr. Willow was a tall slim man, offering a contrast to his stout, bullet-headed partner. Clean shaven and mildly melancholy in aspect he had none of Mr. Wainwright's driving power. But John liked him better than the slightly too genial Mr. Wainwright.

There was no further opportunity for talk, for that gentleman on consulting his watch said that it was

already two minutes past the time at which prayers should commence. He pulled the Bible lying on his desk to a more conspicuous place and touched the bell which was to summon the clerks upstairs.

"We're just about to begin prayers, Bradley. You will be glad to know that we always start the day by asking God's blessing upon our labors. Remember that we always have them at ten minutes past nine, sharp. 'What thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might,'" quoted the portly builder. "I wish everybody served the Lord like us—it pays in the long run."

Whether serving the Lord paid in the long run or not, John's immediate impulse was to fly from what he feared would prove to be the old horror of morning prayers at Dorking in an aggravated form. The clerks, headed by the florid-faced man, trooped in and sat on the chairs arranged for them while a short passage from Ezekiel was read. Then they knelt down, while Mr. Wainwright prayed with considerable unction. Judging from what could be seen of the other men (an inadequate survey between fingers) John felt that his fears were unnecessary. They were quite obviously not expecting to be called upon to offer their petitions. Not so long ago, however, every member of the staff had been expected to take part; that custom was abrogated, because one depraved ruffian, anxious to destroy a custom that disgusted him, had deliberately composed and uttered a prayer which, with its ramifications, had occupied a quarter of an hour of the Lord's—not to mention Mr. Wainwright's—precious time. Since then the two directors were the only worshippers allowed to approach the Mercy Seat. This they did briefly and to the point, never forgetting to

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give a broad hint to the staff by praying for grace that the day's duties might be carried out faithfully and well.

The scoundrel of the elaborate devotion was sentenced—to his immense relief—by being given alone the duty which formerly had been undertaken in turn by the clerks, that of minding the office during prayers.

The fortunes of the well-known building firm of Willow & Wainwright, Ltd., were founded upon the unshakable basis of solid piety and hard cash. Either will do much to secure success in this world; in combination they are irresistible. Most of the piety was derived from the breast of Mr. Wainwright, most of the cash from the pockets of Mr. Willow.

Out of the acorn comes the oak, and from humble beginnings great enterprises are established.

James Walsh Wainwright began his career by being employed as a clerk at a wage of thirty shillings a week by a jobbing builder and decorator in Tottenham. By dint of an earnest behavior at the local Meltonian Chapel's Christian Endeavor Society, coupled to an insinuating address, he eventually succeeding in softening the adamant heart of his employer's virgin but somewhat vinegary daughter. Mr. Goole was not too pleased to hear of the love affair, but out of mortal fear of his daughter was prevailed upon to give a reluctant consent to the marriage; to bless the happy couple; and to take his son-in-law into partnership.

The firm of Goole & Wainwright prospered far more than Samuel Goole had done, and when at the end of four years the senior partner left this earth for the abodes of the Blessed, merited by his constant attendance at and financial support of the Meltonian Chapel,

Mr. Wainwright's sorrow at his father's-in-law demise was tempered by the satisfaction of finding in his own possession a cozy little business.

The young builder was not content to jog along in the old obscure way but longed for fresh worlds to conquer, and cast about for the means. Providence in which he trusted sent him Mr. Willow, the very man for whom he was looking—pious, pliable and possessed of a wife who had money.

Mrs. Willow's fortune, however, had in the course of time become considerably depleted, not through any extravagance on her part or on the part of her husband, but because of a succession of unlucky investments. One of their friends, for instance, persuaded the Willows that it was unfitting for Christians to draw their income from brewery shares, and offered a speculation at once morally justifiable and financially more profitable. Five thousand pounds was sunk in this project, the formation of a company to mine silver in Brazil. Twelve per cent. had been paid regularly for two years, at the end of which time it was discovered that the mine did not exist and that the principal had been divided among the promoters. Stephen Willow was more cautious afterwards. Yet all the business acumen (upon which he prided himself with insufficient reason) did not prevent other serious losses. At last he fell in with Mr. Wainwright, who by showing him the details of a secure investment, and by the display of much artifice, managed to induce him to co-operate in the establishment of the firm of Willow & Wainwright, Ltd.

At first the estate they founded at Golders Green did not prosper as well as had been hoped. The villas run up there sold feebly, and Stephen Willow began to grow

dubious about the undertaking. Then James Walsh Wainwright received one of those brilliant inspirations which when acted upon mark out the truly great. It came one night after a day of anxiety and depression, and Mr. Wainwright woke his wife, who was snoring softly at his side, to communicate his bold idea to her. The Meltonian denomination, though few in numbers, is mainly composed of the solid comfortable lower middle class whose spiritual needs are usually catered to in tiny dingy mission halls in back streets, or in tin chapels. There is a temporary and unworthy character about these places of worship which had done much to keep Meltonianism in an obscurity the truth certainly does not deserve. Why not build in the convenient and attractive suburb of Golders Green a really substantial building which would form the nucleus of a Meltonian colony? Round it could be developed the building estate. He would erect a number of nice modern £50 or £60 a year houses which the faithful could be depended upon to snap up like hot cakes. The scheme would be certain to pay. "We must be," he said, quoting his favorite passage from St. Paul, "not slothful in business, serving the Lord."


Mr. Wainwright's confidence in God, in human nature and in the desire of the Meltonians for sanctification was not misplaced. The speculation proved perfectly sound. Meltonians, hearing of the magnificence of the chapel, which was in course of construction, and seeing the desirability of the houses, also in course of construction, fell over one another in their eagerness to buy or rent a villa at Golders Green. They had the advantage of what came to be vulgarly known as the cathedral, and the society of their kind thrown in for nothing—for nothing except the Sunday collec-

tions, and, as Mr. Wainwright put it bluntly but with horse-sense, "They would have to stump up for them wherever they went."

On its purely commercial side—if one may speak so of the firm of Willow & Wainwright, all of whose activities blended in a sort of hypostatic union spiritual with commercial—the business was carried on by a group, ill-assorted and ill-matched for the holy purpose. Mr. Holden, for instance, the Secretary of the Company, was, as John soon discovered, a hostile critic of his employers. He was not a public reprobate like the ruffian of the lengthy prayer—a short, wizened, bald, badly shaved and dirty old man who wore trousers, waistcoat and coat of different suits—but he was far from being a Meltonian, though he dared not absent himself from morning devotion.

Even the professed Meltonians were not all they should have been. One of them in particular, a young Irishman, slender and wiry and hatchet-faced, the son of a Belfast doctor who was the leader of Meltonianism in his native city, scoffed privately at the Wainwright brand of religion. He accepted the truth of Meltonian dogmas; he attended the cathedral; he had a talent for architectural design and so was useful to his employers; but his conduct was subversive of Meltonian morals and—in so far as it came to affect John—of the Meltonian creed.

Indeed the only man working in the office who was satisfactory in his Meltonianism was Arthur Monson, a tall, slouching young fellow of about twenty-five, with a great capacity for continuous application and an equally great power in prayer. Both gifts were highly valued by his employers. Several of Willow & Wainwright's clerks found it profitable—or at least advis-



able—to attend the Meltonian chapel; but with Arthur Monson, piety was as much a part of his make-up as were his long legs and his trousers baggy at the knees.

In order to please Monson, whose simple earnestness was very touching, John went with him and Maurice Cregan, the Irishman, to one of the prayer meetings held preparatory to a forthcoming "revival." It was, however, more than his sense of humor could endure to hear with due propriety the unctuous Mr. Margradine, the bricklayers' foreman and a deacon, pray that "we may be like the hoil poured from wessel to wessel." And when somebody instead of saying "Amen" at the conclusion gave vent to a stage-whispered "Margarine," John's fitful devotion was ruined by a fit of unseemly though stifled mirth. Worse was to follow later, for zealous Arthur Monson prayed, as was his wont, at great length for the foreign missionaries, specifying their peculiar individual needs in unnecessary detail to the Lord. How many missionaries he seemed to know! "Bless, O Lord, dear Brother Bickerton sowing the good seed in the stony hearts of the Barra-Bonga tribe," his prayers went on, "and bless dear Sister Bickerton. Nor would we forget their dear children. May they grow up indeed in the fear of the Lord and long be spared to their dear parents. And we would also bring before Thee, O Lord, the needs of Brother Lumper in Korea. May the light of Thy gospel shine abroad there. And Brother Cripshaw in Hong-Kong and Sister Millikin in Ispahan. . . ."

So went on Arthur, quite heedless of the fervent "Amens" and "Yea, Lord's" which were meant as intimations that he had better wind up the endless reel of his petitions. But he had spiritual interests in Borneo

and Sumatra and the Straits Settlements which he did not mean to neglect. At last John touched Cregan's arm: "How much longer is the chap going to be?" he inquired softly. "Oh, he'll soon be done now," Maurice answered, "it won't be long before he's home. He's just coming up the Suez Canal!"

The Mission itself went off as these things do—a couple of rockets followed by a dozen damp squibs. The revivalist, Mr. Jonathan Bursleydon, was, as he himself put it, "called by God to break the word of life at Golders Green." Actually he came at the invitation of Mr. Wainwright and for five pounds a week (and all found) for a fortnight. He was a big broad man, with a beard and powerful voice, an assiduously cultivated godly manner, and a hand so flabby that whoever shook it received a shock—for the missionary appeared to be fitted by the name by which he was profanely called, "Burly Bursleydon."

The regular Meltonian minister by no means approved of the revival, partly, no doubt, because he had to submit to practical deposition for the time being, but more because he was no great admirer of the revivalist's personality or methods. In this, however, as in all matters relating to the Meltonian cathedral, he was overborne by the influence of Mr. Wainwright. It is never safe for a dissenting minister to fall foul of the holder of the money bag, for, as he used to say, not without a touch of bitterness, to his more intimate ecclesiastical friends, "We preachers of the gospel of peace are not able to do without the mammon of unrighteousness"—on which principle he deemed himself to have evangelical support.

Mr. Bursleydon had managed to do pretty well out of revivals in a small way. He began, humbly enough,



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as a young man, by working in the Lord's vineyard with a tent and caravan in East Anglian villages, being employed to do this work by "The Rural Tract and Free Salvation Society," who paid him thirty shillings a week and his expenses during the summer, during which he managed somehow to save enough to live through the rest of the year. He had a way with him, an effective combination of humility and jollity, which stood him in good stead with many a dear old lady interested in the saving of souls. For example, he would announce naïvely at one of his meetings, "I have been asking the Lord for a pair of boots—my size is number nine." And sure enough the Lord would hear his prayer! Then Brother Bursleydon would offer thanks with such touching abasement at the next opportunity for public prayer, as to stir some other good soul to inquire in a confidential moment whether he couldn't do with a new suit. Of course he could. So he would roll his eyeball and ejaculate, "How good the Lord is!" That always brought the suit! In this way he managed not only to do pretty well on his thirty shillings a week, but, later, to obtain (as in the case of Golders Green) a number of calls to more useful and lucrative fields of spiritual employment.

The main result of the mission to Willow and Wainwright, apart from the score or so of conversions (mostly of "backsliders" regaining salvation for the tenth time) was a free advertisement of the building estate in the Meltonian paper where a glowing account of the mission appeared, and a consequently increased demand for the Willow and Wainwright houses.

In a minor degree, however, the revival bore fruit in the form of a greater assiduity among Willow and Wainwright's employees. Those who were Meltonians

had been revived most effectively by Mr. Bursleydon's ministrations; those who were not Meltonians felt the general tightening up of the business machine and were affected by it. Mr. Wainwright, who always looked upon service rendered to himself as a religious obligation, was, when elevated to higher spiritual plane than usual, more exacting than usual. Any breach of discipline or neglect of duty at such times took on something of the nature of sacrilege. John omitted to ring up a telephone number as promptly as he should one morning, and was rebuked by Mr. Bursleydon for his inattention, with the question, "Do you think, Bradley, that that is the way a Christian should act?" The next day, Maurice Cregan and John Bradley were having a fencing bout with rulers when Mr. Wainwright entered. The rulers dropped; the young men's faces grew red; and Mr. Wainwright, pained beyond measure, could only find words to murmur, "After the mission; too!"

Mr. Holden, who had entered the room with his chief, called John into his own office. The secretary regarded him steadily but not unkindly for a minute, during which John braced himself for the reprimand that he was sure would be given. But all that Mr. Holden said was, "Well, Bradley, you look an intelligent boy. What do you think of the goings-on upstairs?"

John felt very embarrassed and replied that he did not understand.

"You don't? You soon will!" Then he burst out roundly, "It's all humbug, Bradley, the damndest humbug! You think it's edifying for them to start the day's work with prayers?"

John rather awkwardly replied that he did not know.

"Well, I know, my boy," continued Mr. Holden. "I know. Their religion is the excuse of petty villainy. There they will be on their knees at prayer and sometimes the telephone bell will ring. Up Wainwright jumps and tells the filthiest lies into the receiver. Then he'll ring off and get down on his knees again. What do you think of that?"

John felt very uncomfortable and said nothing.

Mr. Holden resumed his denunciatory discourse. "Now those blasted prayers, like all their affectations of religion, are meant as a cloak to their shady practices. These prayers serve a double purpose—piety and punctuality. Wainwright's nothing if not a *practical* Christian! Woe to anybody who hasn't arrived when the bell goes at ten past nine! Look here, Bradley. Don't mix yourself up with this canting hypocrisy. Old Willow isn't so bad. He doesn't know half of what goes on here. But Wainwright—oh, my God! When I came, Bradley, one of their deacons at the chapel, Mr. Margradine—Margarine they call him because he is such inferior butter—said to me: 'Holden, perhaps the Lord has sent you to Willow and Wainwright to humble you.' . . . If that was the Lord's idea, Bradley, he couldn't have sent me to a better place!"

### CHAPTER III

**M**AURICE CREGAN knocked out the ashes from his pipe against an exposed arm of one of the roots of the tree against which he sat. His face showed some boredom as he said, slowly refilling the pipe, "But why make such a fuss about it?"

John Bradley stood in front of him leaning forward on his stick. "Why? Because it's so frightfully important. If religion is worth anything at all, it is worth *living* religion with all one's might."

"Oh, I used to think so," Cregan retorted, "but long ago I gave up my emotional interest in religion. I believe, because it is a satisfaction to the mind—there the matter ends as far as I am concerned."

"But don't you love God?" John asked.

"My dear Bradley," Cregan went on. "If I were to say that I don't love God you would be considerably shocked. I *believe* in God. If you want me to be more definite, I will add that my doctrinal views are probably harder and clearer than Wainwright's; but loving God is a thing I don't understand. There may be people who love Him; I have tried and I can't."

"I wouldn't believe in a God I couldn't love, Cregan," John answered, now in a great state of agitation. "Tell me what you mean!"

Cregan puffed thoughtfully at his pipe. There was pain in his eyes and his jaws met tightly over the briar. He paused a long while before speaking again. "Let me think how I can explain it, Bradley. I have to find terms in which to put it. You see you are an Englishman and I am an Irishman, and as such I shall seem very cynical to you unless I pick my words carefully."

For five minutes John Bradley walked round the tree, slashing every now and then at the gorse bushes with his stick, while Maurice Cregan smoked in silence.

The tragedy of Cregan was that his religion had never touched his heart. His mind held the creed of Evangelical Protestantism with absolute conviction. His grim logic was founded in Calvinism, but he sep-

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arated dogmatic from moral theology. He was a good example of the peculiar danger of Puritanism, whose invented code, by making innocent actions sinful, tends to result in sinful actions being regarded as innocent. After having been brought up to believe that a game of cards or a glass of beer was evil, and after having found them pleasant, he was inclined to assume that the veto upon other evils was just as arbitrary and academic. He did not deny the evil; but he accepted the pleasure. Another man would have been ruined by such an acceptance—and doomed by easy stages to the worst and basest of habits. But Maurice Cregan—in practice, if not in theory, was as austere as a saint. Though he would certainly have been indignant at the suggestion, he was living upon that creed which he himself hated intensely, that had informed the spirit of his race. One feels of the Irish that they have been immemorially Christian; that if the Faith had not been revealed, the Gael would have discovered it by his own efforts. The fear of physical passion existed in Ireland long before the coming of the cross and crozier of St. Patrick, and it still remains, though in diminished force, even among that part of the Irish who have been cut off from the national tradition. Chastity was alive in Cregan's blood—despite his Puritanical creed.

At last Maurice spoke again. "I know the trouble you feel, Bradley. I felt it at one time—a disgust with the expression of religion so great that it tends to cover even religion with disgust. You have asked me to explain my own attitude. I will. You will probably become an atheist, though I hope you won't. Abstractions are not in your line——"

"Do shut up, Maurice, with your abstractions." burst in Bradley.

Cregan puffed out a cloud of smoke. "You must let me go on in my own way, old fellow. Does God strike you as being very lovable?"

"No. That's just my trouble. He is so ugly that he seems more like the devil. What if the God we believe in is the devil? What if the God we worship is the devil?"

"It is quite evident, Bradley," said Cregan, "that you are unacquainted with the devil, who is a very charming chap and immensely popular among the ladies. Lucifer did not fall so much because of his pride, as because he offended God by cutting too graceful a figure. Since God is God, He can do what He likes, and it pleases Him to act in a certain way with the world. There is no good in denying unpleasant facts; on the other hand, it would be rather hypocritical to pretend that the facts are pleasant. Because you see that they are unpleasant, you deny the facts. I accept the unpleasant facts and for practical purposes ignore them. How do you expect me to love God?"

"But *do* you believe in such a God?" John asked, very much taken aback.

"I do. Of course, there are difficulties in the way of believing in Him, but not so many difficulties as there are in the way of not believing in Him. There are other explanations of the universe. They may hold some water, but they all leak. My faith does not leak."

"Possibly not," John answered quietly. "But what a pity! If I were you, Cregan, if I thought like you, I'd cut my throat and end it all."

"But why?" Cregan said, with some surprise. "I am far more comfortable in my philosophy than you are in your lack of philosophy."

"Look here, Maurice," John went on with increasing warmth, "you are the only Meltonian I know for whom I can have any respect. Pick any of them you like; Wainwright? Faugh! Arthur Monson? Simply a dupe! Mrs. Chambers, the old dame at whose house I have rooms. Why, she's so mean that when her brother visited her the other day (she told me this herself, mind) just as she was about to have tea she didn't have it so that she would not have to give him some. Lord! She was cross that she couldn't have her own tea, as I discovered when I got in at six o'clock!"

"But, my dear John," put in Cregan, "all this has nothing to do with the case. To begin with, Mrs. Chambers is mean because she is a Welshwoman, not because she is a Meltonian. But even if she *were* mean because she is a Meltonian it wouldn't make Meltonianism any less true."

"No," answered Bradley. "But if this religion turns out people of the stamp we know, I conclude that it is a bad religion. If the idea of God terrifies me as it did as a child, I conclude that the picture of God presented to me must really be the picture of Satan."

"Perhaps," Cregan returned grimly. "But I'm willing to take my chance of that. The thing is proved enough for me by the fact of conversion—by the fact that I at one time had no consciousness of God and then obtained that consciousness, which I still retain."

John grew furious at the mention of conversion. "The thing that you offer as proof of the reality of our religion I offer as proof of its unreality. Mind you, I do not say of all religion—there must be a creed cleaner

and saner than ours somewhere. All you people assume that your horrible beliefs are Christianity. Even old Holden in attacking them assumes that much. Only yesterday he said to me, 'Bradley, this is the first Christian firm I ever worked for and it will be the last!' *Is Willow & Wainwright a Christian firm?* I doubt it. Is the narrow and stereotyped affair you call conversion the sum total of Christian experience? Again, I doubt it."

"All right," said Cregan calmly. "Then how do you explain conversion?"

"Conversion be damned!" John answered emphatically. "The whole thing," he went on with the assurance of his twenty years, "can be explained partly as physiological and partly on psychological grounds."

"What the devil do you mean by your confounded scientific terms?" Cregan asked, a sneer curling the corners of his mouth.

"I say it's physiological, because it's one of the many marks of adolescence. I got converted—I was saved—about the same time that I began to shave."

"I see," said Maurice. "And psychological?"

"Like falling in love, an incident practically bound to occur at a certain point in a boy's or a girl's physical development."

"And so would you deny also the reality of falling in love, O Materialist?"

"I'm not denying it or denying conversion, but seeking to explain it. Even if you can convict me of materialism, I don't mind. God gives spiritual gifts by material means . . . I don't mean sacraments," he added hastily, "because I don't believe in them—not yet."

"I believe you do," growled Maurice.



"No, I don't think so. But I believe the five senses were given us to convey more than sensual things to our souls. Oughtn't conversion—if you must have it—to be the abnormal, not the normal thing—a way for helping men who can't be reached otherwise, like tee-totalism? Wouldn't the better way be to glide unconsciously into conversion and turn to God as naturally as the flower turns to the sun—if your pastors would get out of the way and let you? Or, if you like, to have a progressing series of conversions. I read something in a book about the three ways of the spiritual life—the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive way—and though I don't quite know what the words meant the idea seemed——"

"But!" burst in Maurice, "what you are saying is dishonoring to God and to the Holy Ghost!"

"Why? Look at old Wainwright! *He's* converted—but is the process finished and made perfect in his case? I should think not—he wants not three but about fifty-three conversions to bring him to anything like decency. Salvation must be a process—a mighty slow process for some of 'em!"

"You are more interesting as a psychologist than as a physiologist, Bradley," Maurice replied at the end of this tirade. "I want to hear more of what you are driving at! I smell something. Go on."

"What I'm driving at is this," John answered. "These people *feel* saved; therefore, according to them they *are* saved. It's all subjunctive and illusory. They build upon their emotions—and Lord, what emotions! Their religion turns inwardly, upon their precious selves, instead of outwardly, upon God. They have to keep on thumping each other on the back and shouting out that they are born again and going straight to

glory, because they daren't look for ten minutes at God. Salvation should not be their concern but worship. They can't be sure that they are going to Heaven; they can have certainty about the God of Heaven, the creator of their souls: what they *do* is the thing of consequence, not what they palpitate about."

"Very well," said the orthodox Cregan calmly. "Put aside the brand of conversion you object to so much and then tell me how anyone is going to be saved?"

John faltered for a moment. He had to state his alternative and his own mind was vague and so at a disadvantage with Cregan's clarity. But he answered at last, knowing that he had reached the furthest point to which he could go. "Well, I suppose one is thrown back upon the idea of the Sacraments."

"Oh, Hell!" Cregan cried out. "I thought you were making for that. It's my opinion that you'll be a bloody Catholic one day!"

The face of the Orangeman grew fierce and dark. Not another word would he utter and John felt that he dared not at present pursue the matter.

The last golden streak faded from the hills of the Heath, and from where they sat they saw the black outline of the trees edged with dim light fade and mingle into the night. Maurice got up stiffly and in a somewhat surly voice addressed his friend, "Come, Bradley, we won't agree about theology, but I think we will agree over beer."

One could have measured Cregan's moral standards with a pint pot, for the taboo upon intoxicating drink is now the strictest and most sacred of the taboos of Puritanism. When that has been violated, the dykes of worldliness are broken and floods sweep the soul.

Maurice Cregan, upon coming to London from Bel-

fast, had lived in his aunt's house. She, a protestant only in the Belfast sense of consigning the Pope to hell, having nothing of her brother's austerity of life and little of her nephew's rigid dogmatism, made merry havoc with Maurice's upbringing. From the jovial heathen who was her husband, the Meltonian learnt how to play billiards and bridge, to enjoy the theatre and to drink whiskey—in all of which accomplishments he, in turn, instructed John Bradley. But drink was the principal measure of his defection; it marked him off from his co-religionists as no other vanity or vice could.

Later, after the first delicious sense of daring defiance of a moral code had been got over, Maurice and John drank what they preferred to spirits, and called, as in this instance, for beer. They were still self-conscious in the drinking of it, but, like the healthy young men they were, they frankly accepted the Barley Mow as a friend.

There is, upon the edge of Hampstead Heath, an ancient and historic inn known as "The Saracens." Probably the name had originally been "The Saracen's Head," and had lost the second part with the passing of the years and the fading of the memory of England. But the building itself stands unchanged, and is to-day as kindly as men had found it during the fifteenth century. To this inn they made their way, still in silence.

Cregan led his friend along the low-roofed, stone-flagged passage to the bar and there ordered two tankards of ale. Feeling tired after their quick exercise and finding no vacant seat in the saloon, the two men went into the Coffee Room to empty the pewter and to smoke their pipes. Four other men were sitting there

around a small table, so John, with the native reserve of the Englishman, drew his friend to a corner as far away as the size of the room made possible. He glanced at the men with an insolent what-the-devil-are-you-doing-here look in his eye and then, ostentatiously ignoring them, began to talk to Maurice.

The men had evidently been there for the last hour, as they were noisy and at home. Each had already drunk his fair share of beer and had become comfortably happy. Maurice was waiting an opportunity to speak to them, for he scented adventure or at least good-fellowship, but John, the Englishman, continued to hold himself aloof. Maurice's chance came. One of the four men, tired of sitting still, got up and grasping in each hand one of the iron pillars supporting the roof, raised himself up until his body was parallel with the floor, his face turned downwards. After rowdy applause from his companions the man, a bony, genial giant, set himself to perform a feat which was, he assured them, far more difficult than the one they had just witnessed. He again lifted himself up on the pillars, but reversed his position so that he was looking up on the ceiling. One of the men said something that was meant to be a joke and the acrobat lost control and, laughing loudly, fell upon his back. He must have hurt himself, though he would not admit it. Maurice at once advanced to pick up the prostrate hero and broke by doing so through the crust, the thin but rigid crust of convention, and received an invitation for himself and John to join the others.

Six tankards were ordered by one of their new friends and brought in foaming nobly; when these had been emptied Maurice replenished them. Stories full of masculine wit were told and then the giant suddenly

burst into song. Stopping half-way through the second verse of his ballad he said:

"I wonder if there's a piano in the place. If there is, we might as well get to it. It's only a quarter to ten!"

"Find the proprietor," suggested one of the others.

Joe Bagton, who kept The Saracens, was sent for and, coming in beaming with good humor and hot whiskey and water, announced that there was only one piano in the place—upstairs—and unfortunately somebody else was already in possession. "But wait a minute," Mr. Bagton added on second thoughts. "A friend of mine is in the room. I'll go up and see if he would mind you going up. He's a very decent chap, a real chief. We're all chiefs here, aren't we?"

So upstairs the old man went to interview his friend while the six companions in the Coffee Room finished off what was left of their beer and wondered what a "chief" might be. Evidently it was a complimentary term and one deserved on every side, for Bagton came down in a few minutes to say that his friend would be very pleased if they would go up. Entering a lovely old room, long and low and paneled in dark wood to the roof, they found Bagton's friend, introduced to them as "Jumbo." He was a quiet, pleasant young man of about twenty-two; with him sat a kindly attractive girl who made friends with everyone instantly and who soon became known to all present simply as "Maude." As so often happened, when music is suggested, it was not easy to find a man who could sing. So Maurice drove John to the piano—the boy's instrument was the violin, which he could play exquisitely—but to the piano he went and struck off a rapid succession of music-hall airs, the company joining in the chorus, shouting out the words and stamping with their

feet. After that everybody had a song and *would* sing it.

"Jumbo" ordered drinks all round and when those had been finished refused to allow anyone else to pay for the next round. "Not at all. This is my show. . . . Bagton, fetch 'em up—four Scotches, two Irishes and three bitters. And when you get back, Joe, we're going to have a song from you!"

When the proprietor of The Saracens appeared again, followed by a waiter carrying a large tray of tumblers and bottles, Jumbo again reminded him that no party could be complete without a song from Joe, the old man stood up, rapturously applauded by the gathering, and in a high rich quavering voice began to sing, John accompanying on the piano:

Of all the girls that are so smart,  
There's none like pretty Sally.  
She is the darling of my heart  
And she lives in our alley.

This quaint old ballad was perhaps incongruous for so uproarious an assembly, but it was the only song Joe Bagton knew and was received with unbounded delight.

In the jollity of good drink and good-fellowship Maurice had long ago lost his moroseness and John had forgotten their argument of an hour ago. In a vague way he felt a little surprised admiration for Cregan's ability to cut himself in two—to separate his soul from his creed—unhappy gift! But his wonderment did not last long, for John's mind by this time had become somewhat confused. He was making up long and difficult sentences, picking out the words with extreme care so that they should not be slurred and people think him drunk in consequence. Somehow his tongue ap-

peared to be getting caught in his mouth and a frequent hiatus came into the sequence of his thoughts. Now he laughed loudly over nothing at all; again he grew sentimental, tears coming to his eyes as he held the acrobatic giant by the hand and swore that he was the "besh fren" he had ever had. The room appeared to be changed in quality, seen through a new medium, upon another dimension. Actions took on the rapid inconsequence of dreams and were forgotten as rapidly. Maude, who had been sitting with adaptable affection in turn upon the knees of most of the men present, and had submitted without any objection on the part of "Jumbo" to being caressed by them, at last got upon the table and sang a song, all of which disappeared from John's mind except the chorus, which he and everybody there thought the finest thing they had ever heard. It was sung over and over again and ran:

"He had his gorblimy trousers;  
And he had his gorblimy hat."

There seemed to be a great number of verses to the song, and after each the chorus was repeated at least three times. Then, worked up to a great pitch, Maude danced the chorus through upon the table, singing the while and being cheered to the echo. Then somebody climbed on the table and seizing Maude by the waist danced with her. . . . John heard a thud and the crash of broken glass and saw that the two dancers had fallen on the floor. . . . There was laughing and something said that he did not understand. The fun and fury had reached its limit and closing time was announced by the landlord, who reminded the chiefs that it was already a few minutes past twelve.

Maude went off with "Jumbo" in a taxi into the night. All that John remembered was standing in the cold air outside, feeling that he stood upon a square foot of the world that was revolving rapidly upon its own separate axis. Maurice was holding one of his arms while the giant (the last John had seen of him was in that room in The Saracens dancing about the room with a brass coal-scuttle converted into a helmet upon his head) held somewhat uncertainly to the other.

"What's happened, Maurice?"

"That's all right, old chap. Keep quiet and hang on to me. That was a nasty fall you had just now."

The three other men of the party were walking down the road twenty yards in front singing,

"He had his gorblimy trousers,  
And he had his gorblimy hat."

The voices sounded far away. "Is that Maude there in front, Maurice?" asked John.

"No, old chap, Maude has gone away a long time ago."

"Has she? Dam nice girl."

#### CHAPTER IV

**H**OW they got home John never knew, but he awoke next morning lying in Maurice's bed at Laburnum Road. The sun was streaming in through the window and the light hurt his eyes. He put his hands to his head, which was aching intolerably.

Then Maurice came in. "You had better have your



breakfast up here, John. I've made up a yarn for Auntie's benefit. Uncle's all right. He quite understands that it's your first drunk."

"Was I really drunk, Maurice?" John asked ruefully, and at the question his friend went off into loud peals of laughter.

Hot coffee pulled John together, clearing his brain and steadying his nerves. He lit his pipe and propped himself up against the pillows, making a great parade of preparations for reading, but secretly resolving to lie full length and sleep as soon as Cregan had gone. Maurice chuckled a good deal over his friend's misfortune and went off to the office, leaving him instructions to stay in bed until lunchtime. "I'll tell Wainwright," he said, "that you have had a bilious attack. You'll be all right soon. I didn't let you drink too much last night—only you weren't used to it. I thought the amount of drink you consumed wouldn't have hurt a baby." This was humiliating to John, for along with the remorse and the splitting headache had been mingled a satisfaction (up to this moment) at the consciousness that after all he had won his spurs. There was gall in the suggestion that he had been lightly overthrown and carried ignominiously from the field. Yet it must be so. There was Maurice, as fresh as paint this morning. *His* drop of drink had done no harm.

John lay down to sleep as soon as heard the front door clang behind Maurice Cregan, but no sleep came to him. His mind insisted upon reverting to The Saracens, for now that morning had come many of the night's incidents seemed queer and demanded an explanation. In that world of dream, fantasy fitted into its proper place; but the dreamer looked back to the

details of the dream with perplexity. Cregan himself was problem enough with his uncanny capacity for living in two spiritual spheres, but Maude was far more baffling. She seemed a charming girl and quite in keeping with her surroundings—but then that song and the way she danced on the table while singing! . . . He would ask Maurice about it when he got back . . . There seemed to be something about her kissing everyone—just as if she were a child at a party. It was a funny thing to do and yet at the time he thought nothing about it.

“Maurice,” John said when they met at Mrs. Chambers’ that evening. “What did you think of Maude?”

“What do you mean? What do I think of Maude?” Cregan asked cautiously.

“Well, what was she doing at The Saracens? Funny place for a girl to be, you know. I thought she was engaged to Jumbo, but he didn’t seem to mind a bit when she sat with other fellows’ arms round her.”

Maurice laughed. “You dear old innocent! That was nothing. Didn’t you see them all kiss her when she and Jumbo went off in the taxi together?”

“No! did they? . . . Maurice, tell me—I have forgotten so much—did I kiss Maude?”

“I did, but you didn’t. You were too rottenly drunk at that stage for any self-respecting girl to kiss!”

“You *didn’t*!” cried John, half in horror and half in admiration.

“Didn’t I?” Cregan returned scornfully. “I’m not going to boast about it. Kisses were as plentiful as blackberries last night. Still there’s not much in a kiss from——”

“Maurice,” John interrupted, “you haven’t told me



what she was doing at The Saracens." He winced a little while he insisted upon getting the information he wanted.

Cregan's chief vanity was an assumption of experience. He was enjoying himself with John. "You dear old fathead! Couldn't you see what she was?"

John gasped. Even had he been in the full possession of his faculties he might have missed the hideous explanation. She seemed to him at the time a nice girl given to eccentricity: but now that did not seem to cover the whole ground. "Do you mean," said John, "that she . . .?"

Maurice nodded. "Of course, that's what she is. Why, one of those fellows, the man who had the brown suit, made an appointment to meet her one evening next week!"

"But she seemed a nice girl, Maurice?"

"Of course. There wouldn't be much virtue left in the world if they were all like her. I tell you what I'll do. This very evening I'll show you what men and women are like. We'll go to Piccadilly. You'll be able to see for yourself the painted madams walking about shameless in silk and satin—winking at the passers-by. Come along!"

John was instantly aflame with that devouring curiosity which has consumed so many souls; for in nine cases out of ten men fall into sexual sin not so much from a desire to enjoy it as from a desire to know about it. Cregan, who had provoked that curiosity, had considerable contempt for it. When he kissed Maude, he did so in a mood of bitter scorn, and he had prevented John from kissing her. At the leave-taking he had pushed Bradley into a chair, and Maude was fuddled

enough not to notice that one of the "chiefs" had omitted to give her his salute. But now that John had discovered her profession, Maurice thought that he had an opportunity of killing John's curiosity with a strong dose of horrors. He had him in the mood for receiving an effective object lesson; he also had the chance for displaying his own experience of the world.

Maurice's very moroseness sprang out of a fierce hatred for sex. In spite of his personal pride and a personal daintiness that made him loathe physical passions, he was conscious enough of such passions in himself to go in perpetual fear of them. His cynicism was worn as an armor and had hardened like tempered steel. His moral anarchism demanded some such strong protection.

John, as Cregan was aware, had dangerous curiosity, and he determined to arm him as he himself was armed. But he was unaware that the Englishman could not be successfully dealt with in this way.

John had known that there was some secret connected with Piccadilly, else why the continual reference to that locality in music-hall songs? There was some esoteric meaning, hitherto sealed and now to be revealed to him. He was quite young—hardly twenty—and had seen nothing of the world except so much of it as Cregan had chosen or been able to show him. At school there had been the usual quantity of mean vice and sniggering touchings upon the meaning of "being married," but the thing was so pitifully narrow and ignorant that John had avoided the society of those who wished to show him certain marked passages of the Bible and some alleged anatomical sketches, which had, together with their descriptive explanations, very little

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relation to actuality. But now, under the competent tutelage of Maurice, he was going to see the "madams," to view life steadily and to view it whole.

They arrived at the Piccadilly Circus Tube Station a little after nine o'clock and from there walked round Leicester Square "seeing life"—and John Bradley was as shocked as Cregan determined he should be.

His imagination had expected seductive houris who could draw the souls out of men with their compelling eyes, but instead it was a vision of ghastly sadness. The pasty, sullen faces, the wanton and ugly carriage, the counterfeit gaiety of the wretched women he saw mincing along the pavements made him sick and ashamed. If the cool, ironical Cregan had not been there, Bradley would have at once taken the tube for home. But Cregan made him walk up and down, commenting freely the while upon the passers-by. John shuddered once or twice at his friend's brutality and cried, "My God, Maurice! How can you talk like that? It's awful! It's awful!" To which Cregan replied with calculated callousness, "Yes, the man would be a damn fool who paid a couple of quid for that bird in the yellow hat."

Once Maurice even took John up a side street by Shaftesbury Avenue and deliberately loitered to offer the chance of an accosting. John seized his arm. "Let's get out of this, Maurice, or I shall be sick," he whispered hoarsely.

"Don't be an ass," was the unsympathetic reply. "Look at these two coming along. Walk slowly. I want to have a good look at them."

As they reached the two girls one of them said something to Cregan, who stopped. John was terrified

but could not escape. The best thing he could do was to stand by Maurice for help.

"Well, old Sport," she began.

"I did not quite catch that observation," Cregan replied with mock politeness.

"'Ere, chuck it, 'Erb! Are you and your pal coming along with us?"

"Meaning him?" said Cregan, nodding to John.

"Who else should I mean? You coming?"

"John," said Cregan in a level voice. "This young lady asks if you are going with her. Would you like to?"

Cregan enjoyed Bradley's embarrassment, the source of vast amusement to one of the girls. The other had no time for entertainment, business being pressing. "Leave 'em, Liz," she snarled. "The silly —s! Corse that pale faced baby won't come. And the other feller's only pulling our legs." With that the two girls went on towards the glaring lights of the Avenue.

At last Cregan, realizing that he had inflicted enough upon Bradley, took him into the Café Royal. This was, by comparison with the mental tortures he had undergone, a welcome respite. "Maurice," he groaned, "how dreadful it all was!"

"And a good deal more dreadful than you imagine, Bradley," said Cregan, suddenly becoming vehement. "That's what Maude will come to sooner or later—walking the streets and coaxing swine to filth. Maude was nicer than those detestable little cats we've just been speaking to—but it's always the same in the end. Cut the apple and there's nothing but dust, disease and death inside!"

Inside the Café Royal John tried to adjust his soul.

He was shaken and dared not look around him for some time. When he did peer about the large heavily gilt room, many of the women sitting on plush seats at the marble tables seemed to belong to the same class from which he had just escaped. They were not so vulgar, they were more freakish—that was all. Cregan, however, reassured him. "You needn't worry here, John. No one will touch you. Here, waiter!" he cried to an evil-looking German. "Two whiskeys and sodas!" Then turning to Bradley, he added, "We'll drink them up and get home."

The waiter was some time in bringing the drinks. Maurice having seen at the other end of the room a man he knew, left John for a few minutes to himself.

No sooner had he gone than two men came in from the lobby who, making their way through the crowd, finally seated themselves two tables away from where John Bradley sat. They ordered absinthe, and took up again what was evidently an argument which they had left unfinished in the street. Between them and John was a table where two Italians were drinking and talking, so that John could only catch the general drift and not the details of their debate.

"Yes," said one, the elder of the men, tall, massively built, but along such lines that every movement of his face or body was a gesture expressive and even violent, "Yes, your Catholic philosophy attracts me. Like most Agnostics I could say that if ever I came to believe in religion, it would be the Catholic religion. But I cannot believe. It is not so much that any single doctrine repels me. I will admit transubstantiation and all lesser miracles, but I will not admit free-will, I cannot."

"That to you then is the greatest of all miracles," replied his companion.

"No, it is the key to all miracles. Prove the man is free in will and it follows that God is freer than man. If man can really act capriciously (you see I put it so as not to drag in any other question than will) God can act still more capriciously. He could, if he liked, turn the sky suddenly yellow and the sea pink just for fun. Only He doesn't."

John did not catch the retort of the other debater, because the Italians talked loudly and in complete indifference to what was happening next to them. But when the big man spoke again, bringing a tremendous fist down upon the marble, his words were clear enough.

"Though the determinist position is unassailable I grant that in practice I envy you. Confession seems to me to be the most powerful weapon for good in the world and you are the only people who hold it."

The debater who was the big man's opponent leaned forward across the table, his eyes dancing, "My dear House, what right have you as a determinist to long for Confession? You deny your own philosophy as a whole by your various opinions in detail."

House leaned back and laughed loudly. "Yes, I lay myself open, Donovan. You convince me of everything else except the one thing necessary. When all the out-works have fallen, the citadel remains."

"But, House, you yourself are always insisting upon responsibility. When a man does not act as you wish, nobody condemns him so energetically as you do. And yet what right have you to condemn him? His simplest, like his most complex actions, however free they may appear to be, are according to you bound by a rigid



necessity. We are drinking absinthe instead of whiskey, not because we chose to do so, but because we couldn't help ourselves! Our order sprang out of the irresistible impetus of a thousand known and unknown influences, and we only obey the determination of circumstances."

"Donovan," answered the big man, starting to prepare a second glass of absinthe. "My philosophy is the negation of all other philosophies. In practice, I who deny human responsibility insist upon it more strongly than you do. You make allowances for a man's actions according to the creed that prompts those actions; I make no such allowances. Because I am a determinist I look merely at results. The complete skeptic is able to admire the Church for what she achieves, without bothering about what she teaches."

The second debater gesticulated with an absinthe spoon, as he spoke, eagerly leaning forward. "You are not a philosopher, House, but a mystic," he said. "Philosophically, you have no leg to stand on, but all your intuitions go to the mark——"

"Of necessity," put in House.

"I'm not going to argue that at the moment. You admire the Church for what she achieves: she achieves it because of what she teaches."

"No, because of what she *does*. She is a standing example of the force of experience. Take Confession—she is strong because she adapts herself to circumstances. Take celibacy—again she takes her virtue from necessity. Marriage—her theories are merely the fruit of unalterable facts. She has carefully suited her actions to the world and then has invented theories to explain her actions."

The man addressed as Donovan was beginning a

speech, preceded by a flourish of the absinthe spoon, at the moment when John's attention was distracted by the return of Maurice. He felt vaguely a certain similarity between the standpoint of the two debaters and the standpoint of Cregan and himself. His own likeness to Donovan was not so clear to his mind, as was the correspondence between the dogmatism of the agnostic, who completely disregarded the moral results of his dogmatism, and a similar intellectual dualism in Maurice.

To his great surprise, Cregan greeted the two men as he came up; but to his disappointment the lateness of the hour prevented very much more than bare introductions. House and Donovan interested him and he felt that, could he have listened long enough, he would have found in their arguments a key to some of his own difficulties.

The flaring lights of the street and the procession of women upon the pavement brought back the shame and shock of the earlier part of the evening. Maurice walked as quickly as he could to the Tube station, dragging John along without further comment or any attempt to impress a lesson more deeply upon his mind.

The effect of the expedition was not apparent until some weeks later, when the impression of horror had to a great extent faded from John's mind and had been superseded by an inward curiosity. After all, he came to argue, there was another side to the question. There must be many Maudes in the world. There was nothing hideous about them. On the contrary, they were almost alone among women in their masculine gift of good-fellowship. There must be some attraction in such a life, for so many girls to adopt it. He had seen

just what Maurice Cregan had allowed him to see under the flaring unreality of street lamps; but behind it all there surely was the promise of satisfaction. John brooded over things morbidly, slowly wakening in himself powerful sleeping evil desires, which, once awake, raged and roared day and night.

He was utterly at the mercy of malign forces. The fiery enthusiasm of thorough conversion had never been his, and the fitful flame had long ago expired. There was no longer any taste of God in his mouth. The longing for God that had been in his heart turned sour and applied itself to other solaces. His religion offered no means of grace for the strengthening of his soul, and under the strain his soul most ignominiously broke. He fought, desperately—in agony but without hope—and was conquered.

At first, without admitting his purpose to himself, John hung about The Saracens in the hope of meeting Maude again. Joe Bagton he avoided, because he feared that there might be in him a gift for divining other people's minds. Without Joe's help, however, there seemed to be no opportunity of meeting Maude—and eventually, though in the deepest disgust, he determined to make another expedition to Piccadilly. Breeding and habits of decency were not laid aside at a moment's notice, but they were overcome by the relentless desire within him, and one evening John went out alone to the district where he and Maurice Cregan had a few weeks previously gone together.

With hunger mingled with horror in his heart John walked for an hour and a half up and down Shaftesbury Avenue, Leicester Square and the neighboring streets. Though the voice of a girl near him was enough to make his cheeks pale and his limbs tremble in terror, a cruel

goad drove him up and down seeking seduction. If only one of these women would stop and speak to him. If only one of them would make a sign. Several did make signs, minute, yet distinct; but John was too agitated for observation. The signs were wasted upon him.

Curiosity and a longing for experience wrestled with his shrinking flesh. On how little the issue depended! John could not bring himself to make the advance, but he could and did try to offer opportunities for an advance on the part of one of these scores of women sauntering by. Twice, to make it easier for the seducer, he stood still before a shop-window and, shaking with excitement, waited for a word to be whispered in his ear. None was spoken. Some protecting hand seemed to be over him. Perhaps it was the open eye of a policeman who saved him from being accosted. Perhaps he did not appear to be game big enough for the trouble he might give. Whatever the reason, he went away unscathed of body, yet suffused with shame at the consciousness of frustrated desire and humiliated by his lack of nerve. He had failed; he accepted his defeat.

## CHAPTER V

**J**OHN was in an emotional crisis when he arrived at Mrs. Chambers' house, which was symbolically situated exactly halfway between the office and the Meltonian "Cathedral." He forgot to take off his hat and light overcoat and paced up and down the room. The fact he was faced with was his own weakness; he knew

himself to be both a cad and a coward. Would he ever be able to lift his head again? His face, paler than it was when we first saw it over two years ago, had its pallor emphasized by the flush contrasting with it on his cheeks. His eyes were tired but unnaturally bright and they burnt a little. He looked feverish and worn.

The most hopeful fact about him was his energy. The stick fell where it had been thrown upon the bed and with clenched fists John walked up and down. "I have no decision for anything," he muttered every now and then. "But I *will* find a way to pull myself together." He was beaten and broken. "The only thing to do is to start right again from the beginning. But how?" He took a big Boer briar out of a rack containing two other briars, a clay, a corncob and a calabash, and, having filled it, from a little tin box such as navvies carry, with the shag he reserved for the Boer briar and hours of concentration, he sat down in a huge basket-chair, put his legs over the side, and began to think.

The briar went out two or three times and at last, only half-finished, was laid upon the table. John got up, a fierce joy in his eyes, and stretching out his arms cried softly, "I have it. Discipline!" Going over to his Gladstone bag that stood in a corner of the room he pulled out one of the straps, then carefully took off his overcoat, coat, waistcoat and shirt. His smooth white skin shone like ivory in the electric-light as he saw it over his shoulder in the looking-glass on the dressing table. He gripped the iron buckle and winding the strap round his hand, swung the leather over his head and on to his back. After he had given himself a half a dozen strokes, John looked again in the

glass. His back was criss-crossed with pink. It was not enough. He looked at the strap and thought a moment; then, taking it by the other end, swung the buckle in a wide circle round his body and struck at himself. The buckle fell, doing no great damage, in the small of his back. The range had not been found. John shifted his grip, holding it further up by a foot and hit out savagely. This time the iron caught him under the right shoulder blade and he groaned. His right arm felt powerless, numbed from the shoulder. After a short pause, he struck again, aiming more carefully, and hit the middle of his back. A great weal showed up under the light, giving satisfaction to the flagellant. Six times he struck, and the fourth and fifth strokes, falling upon previously bruised places, drew blood. The sixth stroke missed its mark, the buckle falling over John's side. "That's enough," he muttered to himself. "Get into bed, you dirty carcase!"

The "dirty carcase" fell asleep almost immediately, tired out with the exertions of the day, and, when it awoke next morning, revolved in its mind a method not only of discipline, but also the necessity for some scheme of life. It is not easy to do this at the spur of the moment. Religious orders have spent centuries of experience and legislation to perfect their rules; and a callow lad in his twenty-first year, all of whose standards have suddenly dropped to pieces, is not likely to devise any very useful scheme lying in bed on an August morning. The decision that John did come to was inevitably crude. He had sufficient sense of humor to know that he dared not breathe a word of his design to anyone; that Maurice, for instance, would split his sides if he knew what John proposed. Ludi-

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crously inadequate as John's rule of life was, here it is.

To rise at six every morning. To take a cold bath (a thing from which his natural indolence had hitherto shrunk)—and then to go through some light gymnastics before an open window. After this, the ascetic was to stand silent a few minutes before solemnly reciting:

"I made them lay their hand in mine and swear  
 To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,  
 To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,  
 To honour his own word as if his God's,  
 To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,  
 To love one maiden only, cleave to her,  
 And worship her by years of noble deeds,  
 Until they won her; for indeed I knew  
 Of no more subtle master under heaven  
 Than is the maiden passion for a maid,  
 Not only to keep down the base in man,  
 But teach high thought and amiable words  
 And courtliness, and the desire of fame,  
 And love of truth and all that makes a man."

Then on top of Tennyson's sententious romanticism was to come as a crown, half a dozen hard hits every evening, from the buckle-end of the Gladstone bag strap! On Sundays, when there would be the opportunity of making an excuse to Mrs. Chambers and of going out for the day, there would be a fast—at least from breakfast until supper-time. All this was what John seriously proposed to himself as a means of taming his flesh and of cultivating his soul. Absurd? Truly absurd and yet not more absurd than nine out of ten such schemes; not more absurd, in particular, than the spiritual exercises of some Theosophical societies!

For at least a month John Bradley zealously ob-

served his self-imposed and self-invented rule of life. The recitation of the Round Table Creed had its effect in a greater attention to business which Mr. Wainwright observed with pleasure and which went far to reconcile his employer with John's recent open breach with Meltonianism. There was an element of the smug and sentimental in John, but it is only just to say that such an element was not due to his own fault. He had been severely limited by his upbringing and consequently his attempts to break out of a familiar intellectual environment were characterised with some of the most priggish marks of Protestantism. He was blindly but sincerely groping towards better things.

In some dim way John Bradley felt that a successful rule of life needed a successful religion as its basis, and reacted, perhaps partly under the unconscious influence of the overheard debate at the Café Royal, but more because of the fact that the strongest reaction possible to him was a reaction toward Catholicism, towards the idea of Roman ritual. There, he felt that he would be able to find that aesthetic appeal and that emotional impulse which he still so profoundly lacked.

When Maurice had accused him of being a potential Catholic, John had laughed at the absurdity of the idea. Yet the suggestion had a secret power. After all there might be something in it. He realized that he knew practically nothing of historic Christianity. He wanted to know something.

Venturing forth the next evening John came to a little tin chapel. He crossed the threshold furtively, hoping that nobody who knew him saw him enter. The place was dim and dingy. One little point of light near the altar, and two ugly gas jets flaring halfway



down the aisle showed a small and shabby interior in which three or four people were praying. John took a seat almost at the back so that he might observe what went on more effectively. There was an air of stillness and of expectancy. People began to filter in, perhaps a couple of dozen in all. They were mostly very poor. On entering each took holy water from the font and made the sign of the cross and then genuflecting knelt in prayer. There seemed to be no emotion, only a quiet intentness as they waited in silence with their eyes fixed upon the gaudy brass door of the tabernacle. The walls were lined with highly coloured and crude prints which marked the Stations of the Cross. At each end of the altar rail was a statue, one of the Mother of God with her child in her arms, the other of St. Joseph also with the Divine Child. Neither statue had the slightest artistic merit. A side altar had rising above it the last and worst statue of all. It represented Christ standing pointing to his breast where His heart was lying exposed. John thought he had never seen anything so horrible as this example of misplaced anatomy. Why, he asked himself, must they drag out the naked heart, as if this were a surgical museum?

His observations were interrupted suddenly by the lighting the candles, after which the priest, attended by a young man and two boys in dirty cottas, came out of the Sacristy to the altar. The cleric was wearing a cope which, though shabby, was by comparison the one touch of splendor in the place, but the man himself had not shaved that morning and seemed to be perfunctory in the performance of what he had to do. Unlocking the tabernacle he drew out the Host and placed It in a Monstrance. As he genuflected before

It a wheezy harmonium began to play a tune John knew. They often sang it at the Meltonian chapel. But not such words. All the hymns John had ever heard were *about* something; about salvation or heaven or (less frequently) about God. This hymn was *to* a person; and began with the noble Latin vocative:

*O Salutaris Hostia!*

The hymn at an end, the priest rose up and mumbled a prayer from a card handed him by one of the boys. Then came the rosary. John was thoroughly bored, for that devotion seemed endless to him and to be nothing else than the vain repetitions of the heathen. Yet in this again he could not avoid noting the direct touch with a person, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." At last the rosary ended and the harmonium squeaked and grunted out a jiggy tune according badly with the sonorous Latin:

*Turris Davidica,  
Turris Eburnea,  
Domus Aurea,  
Ora pro nobis!*

Again the vocative.

The priest stood up and read from the card, after which another tune John knew began. Had Catholics stolen Protestant tunes, or had Protestantism taken the tunes and left the words and the faith behind?

*Tantum Ergo Sacramentum  
Veneremur cernui.*

The heads of the worshipers bowed at the lines. It was not easy to follow this Latin, pronounced in a way

different way from that taught at his old school. But John managed to catch the drift. It was a massive hymn, full of a slow solemn drama, each line capable of being acted.

A hush fell upon the congregation as the priest mounted some steps and then descended with the Monstrance in his hands. He set it down upon the altar, knelt a moment and then turning towards the people held the Monstrance before them in blessing. A bell tinkled three times. There were sounds of thuds and a whispered prayer for mercy coming from one of the pews. Looking up, John saw that there was a wrinkled little French woman, huddled in the shadow of one of the pillars beating her breast. Then the priest and his acolytes returned to the Sacristy, while one by one the members of the tiny congregation rose up, genuflected, crossed themselves with holy water and passed out.

As John came out the muffled roar of buses plunging along through the night smote upon his ear. He was disappointed. Catholicism seemed ever drearier and duller than Meltonianism. He had not expected in a little tin tabernacle all those magnificent details of worship which Protestants tell each other account for the hold of the Catholic Church. He did not stipulate for tall and slender columns that melted away into the dreamy distance of a fretted roof; altars resplendent in gold and porphyry; mellow music filling the aisles with color and boys' clear voices rising splendid like swords; and clouds of heavy, drowsy, incense-making immemorial ritual more mysterious. Less than this could not have satisfied John's mood; and yet he acknowledged to himself that it would have been unjust to demand so much. But to be put off with that tawdry glamor, that cheap tinsel, made him angry.

He walked back to Mrs. Chambers', under a sky clear and candid with stars. What were altar lights compared with these candles kindled in heaven or incense when the breath of Autumn blew off from the trees on the heath? Suddenly he stood still, seized with a doubt of his own criticism. There must be something in it. Perhaps the church was like her Lord who had no form or comeliness that we should desire Him. Men *did* desire the Church and died for it. Could it be that in that mean and ugly tin chapel religion bared a heart as naked as the heart lying so horribly exposed upon the statue?

When he reached his room he found his Boer briar again and sank back into thought. Tobacco smoke was a saner and manlier incense after all.

He tried to get at the core of the matter. There must be a strength about Catholicism or it could not mould the minds of men as it did. But as he had heard House say to Donovan, it was the *system* which worked. Ages of experience of human needs had perfected it. To those who could accept it that system brought spiritual rest. Could he, John Bradley, accept it? Manifestly not! Though unquestionably it would mean security to him and the settling of doubt. . . . At last he rose and knocked his pipe into the grate. "I'm suffering from nerves," he said to himself, "and a mood has caught me off my guard. The doctrines of the Catholic Church have long ago been discredited by all intelligent people. System—that's what it is, that and nothing more."

He went over to his Gladstone bag for the improvised scourge and by force of habit stripped himself. Suddenly his disappointment changed into pique and he flung the strap into the corner. "Here am I," he mut-

tered. "Girding against the Catholic system and practicing it at the same time. "I've nearly become a humbug myself. Better drop the whole affair!" So saying he tumbled into bed.

The next morning, he excused himself from the bath, (not, however, without a little secret contempt for the correspondence between his excuse and his convenience), arguing that though it were good in itself it belonged to the perfectly futile mode of life he had adopted and which he was going to give up. But force of habit took him through three lines of the Tennysonian creed, ere a disgusted memory checked his words.

In order to break more effectually from the ascetic habits of the past month John Bradley went immediately after dinner to the Café Royal. He arrived early, by half past nine, before the Café filled up, for it is a point of honor with the regular patronizers to come late and to go late. Until recently, until in fact John felt that going to the Café Royal was inconsistent with the austerity of his mode of life, Maurice and John had been in the custom of going two or three times a week to what they imagined to be, and indeed what probably is, the Mecca of London Bohemianism. John had only been a dozen or so times in all, because he found that such visits conflicted with the spirit of discipline. Neither he nor Cregan had really liked the place; both would have infinitely preferred a cosy bar in an ordinary pub; but the Café Royal certainly offered opportunities, not obtainable elsewhere, for watching the antics of a crowd of freaks. Maurice and John imagined that its atmosphere made for intellectual brilliance—although upon them as upon a good many other people that atmosphere had, if anything, a stupefying effect.

One advantage there was: in it one could get Bohemianism on the cheap and be, for a time at least, in this world of the artists and poets and journalists who went there to be admired. There was magic about genius—even about third rate or disreputable genius.

John found a seat at the far end of the room from which he could watch the company. He was quite alone and was left alone in the seclusion of his own thoughts. Having ordered his beer and lit his pipe he looked about to see what was going on. In one corner a tall, shaggy man (Maurice had pointed him out once before as Merton, the sculptor) was holding his court. One felt epigrams in the air. The party was solemnly, almost ritualistically, clever. A merrier group was gathered about Bernstein, one of the leading lights of the New English Art School. Several women were in that group. One had her hair neatly cropped in a straight line round the neck-like one of Titian's young men, and wore a peacock-blue blouse. Another, more daring, wore yellow.

Many women were scattered about, sometimes with men, sometimes alone or with another woman. *Three* were never together. John watched a startling staccato personage dressed in black. She had no sleeves to her dress and very little skirt. Upon one of her thin, brilliant arms was a large diamond-shaped patch set to accentuate its whiteness—an acute accent, he added mentally. John stared at her. He knew she would not mind. Nobody does mind being stared at in the Café Royal.

Even the men came here in fantastic attire. In the middle of the room a tall, big-built, languid young man attitudinised beside one of the pillars. He wore carefully cut mid-Victorian clothes and mutton-chop

whiskers. John had seen him before, but was always interested, if irritated by the sight.

At the adjoining table a long-necked youth was preparing absinthe, and Bradley noted the details: The perforated spoon laid across the glass, the lump sugar and the slow trickle which formed the wicked and subtle drink. It seemed easy enough and John felt that he would like to order absinthe for himself, but he feared he would make a fool of himself when it came to the manufacture. So he ordered more beer instead, his first glass being empty by now, and settled himself down to the enjoyment of it and of tobacco.

The hands of the clock crept on until they reached eleven. The large room was now crammed to suffocation, but John noticed nobody now. Feeling pleasantly sleepy owing to a succession of beers and the heavy smoke-laden atmosphere and steady soothing murmur of talk all round him, he lay back upon the seat he was occupying to rest his head upon the plush. The pipe grew stale, so he lit a cigarette and blew rings up towards the ceiling and dreamily watched them break and fade into the general mist, thinking peacefully of nothing at all.

For some minutes he was unconscious that his hair was being stroked by someone sitting behind him. The sensation was soothing and so much in accord with the unreality and languor of the place and hour that John took the stroking for granted and failed to observe that it came from a feminine hand. At last he roused himself to see to whom it belonged. Without lifting his head, he turned on one side, when his eyes met those of Maude smiling above him.

"You don't mind me doing it?" she asked.

"Why, no," John answered sleepily. "It's very de-

lightful." And he closed his eyes. Maude went on for a few minutes and then grew tired of her employment. John sat up.

"You've stopped," he said reproachfully.

"My dear boy," she replied, "I can't go on stroking your hair for ever—even if it *is* very nice hair. Come round here and talk to me. I'm lonely and so are you, I expect."

John Bradley accepted her invitation and seated himself beside her, ordering two more drinks. Maude contented herself with lime juice. As he talked to her he thought how friendly she was. He wondered if Maurice had been right; somehow he was pleased to think that Maurice was not with him.

They talked (without animation on the girl's part) of the evening at The Saracens; Maude evidently had other matters in her mind. Suddenly she said slowly and softly, looking straight at him. "Would you like to come home with me tonight?"

John's head swam, and for one delirious moment he had the sensation of being carried out of his volition by those eyes so full of meaning. Then deeply buried things rose in him, a desire for fight even stronger than for this delight. The mere fact of surprise threw him upon his guard. If he could have thought about it he would have failed. Maude saw his answer in the crimson flooding his face.

"Oh, all right, John, never mind—if you think your mother wouldn't like it."

The taunt spoken quietly and with no hint of irony stung him.

Maude went on. "I shan't ask you to stay if you don't want to, but come round to my flat and have some coffee. You might as well have it there as here and I



live close by. We're old friends you know, Chiefs," and she laughed at the reminiscence.

It would have been churlish to refuse. But John had no wish to refuse. The spirit of resistance had gone; a new spirit riotously surged in his blood. Tennyson and his paled unreality were completely forgotten; the old fastidious shrinking of the flesh had gone. Here was a friend, and an opportunity that would never occur again. "I'd love to come, Maude," he said. "You lead the way and I'll follow when I've paid for the drinks. Hi, waiter!"

But before the waiter arrived, there fell from behind him a thunderous slap on his shoulder, and John swung round to find Donovan and House. "We are still disputing about religion, Mr. Bradley," said the young Irishman. "Come and drink philosophy and beer—celestial shandy gaff! No, no," he went on, as John tried to explain that he had to go. "We won't let you go, will we, House?"

For answer the big man leaned over the back of the bench and lifted John to the side upon which they stood.

"Do you know what I'd think of you if you leave us?" asked the burly House.

"No," said John.

House bent down and pushed his genial face, full of mock ferocity, into John's. "I'd think you were a lousy tyke. Here's the waiter. Sit down!"

"It's gone half past twelve o'clock, sir," said the obsequious German.

"And so no more drinks? Is that what you mean?"

"Only coffee or lime juice, sir."

"Stinking with the Manichæan heresy," commented Donovan.

The waiter looked puzzled. "Very good coffee, sir," he remarked differentially.

"Well, bring us three cups then," Donovan replied. "Sit down Mr. Bradley. We must drink something."

Maude, a sensible and good-natured girl, in spite of her abominable trade, took in the situation and went out alone.

## CHAPTER VI

WITH the desperation of a drowning man John had clutched at a straw. He did not of course realise that it was a straw and indeed his despairing energy had been rewarded by finding the flimsy substance turn into something very like a raft—so a great deal could be said for his deficient vision. The raft in question walked on two legs, of which only two very neat ankles could be seen, and John was at the moment at which this chapter opens paradoxically pulling the raft up a very steep hill on the Surrey downs. Triumphantly he reached the crest and making a final tug lifted a pretty, slightly built girl of eighteen beside him. "There, Elsie," he said, "we've reached the top."

Elsie picked out of her dress, made of some rough reddish-brown material, several pieces of gorse that had attached themselves to her during the ascent, and sat down on John's raincoat thrown down on the grass for her.

"Look, darling," he said, pointing with his stick down to the valley, where a gleaming white road ran. "There amongst those trees, from which the smoke curls, is the inn where Keats wrote 'Endymion'."

The girl pouted a little. She did not like unintelligible conversations. "What was Endymion?" she said.

The boy laughed. So far from feeling disappointed that Elsie did not know, he took pleasure in her ignorance. It seemed part of her adorable simplicity. Besides, it gave him the opportunity of displaying his own knowledge, so he told her the legend of the poem—to Elsie's secret boredom.

"That was very nice," was her comment at the close.

"George Meredith used to live somewhere about here," he said a moment later.

Elsie had never read George Meredith, so John—this time to the girl's legitimate and open boredom—tried to condense "The Egoist" for her.

"There," he said at last, a little hurt by her indifference, "you should read the book. I'll lend it to you. It's impossible to boil it down. . . . Nelson in that garden said good-by to Lady Hamilton." He pointed to the valley.

That did interest Elsie. She knew about Nelson and had often seen his pillar in Trafalgar Square. She did not care for poetry—except that written by Ella Wheeler Wilcox and the occasional sonnets written to herself. John was trying to form her taste.

They sat there in the new spring sun which sparkled on the girl's cloud of light hair, speaking little, but drinking in happiness, while down in the valley, during that bright hour of wonder, the unheeding race of men went past.


A train roared and rumbled somewhere out of sight, and along the dusty roads motors shot along and foot travelers crawled as small as ants. Occasionally, across the hill on which they sat would wander other

lovers, sharing the same air and sky and drinking deeply with them of enchantment. For these John had sympathy mixed with an equal amount of pity. Poor things who thought they understood love! Love they perhaps might in some fashion, but how inadequate were all other loves but his. They might have official engagements, but John could not believe that they loved so completely or had sounded love to the utmost depths as he and Elsie had done. If the world only knew it, if these tentative lovers only knew it, before them was a passion unique in the history of love. New names would have to be inscribed upon that sacred roll marked with names of Dante and Beatrice, Abelard and Heloïse, and all the holy canon of love's Saints—names which should lead that shining list—John and Elsie!

Every tree wrapped in a tender mist of delicate young leaves seemed full, not so much of the recurrent Spring, as of love now descended for a witness to the earth. Moon and stars and skies touched with sunset were the symbols of love—of their love, and the universe was born again in the joy of their hearts.

His love seemed to John a miracle, for at the point at which his self-respect was wrecked and his religion made a ruin, love had rescued him. His fatal indecision was a thing which could now be laughed over. Of course, so he told himself, his soul had wavered. Until now what other strength could it have except love? Of course he had been unsatisfied. With what else should a man be comforted except with love?

It had grown from a small seed, this flowering rose! At a time when everything seemed to be lost he had found it and it had saved him. A chance encounter, the idleness of an hour—and from these had sprung



the beauty and joy which now filled his life. To consider it was to be filled with abasement at a sense of his own unworthiness and with gratitude for what Elsie had done for him. He did not mind mixed metaphors. She was the straw at which he had clutched. She was the raft that could carry his soul above the turbulent waters.

A tea shop was the hub round which the terrestrial globe spun. There it was that John, in the autumn of the previous year, ate in spiritual dejection, but with a hearty physical appetite, no less than four muffins and three slices of cake along with his pot of tea, before taking the waitress's check. In passing to the door, pressing between two tables, he caught the edge of his coat against a cup. His carelessness was not without cosmic consequences. Turning sharply round at the crash and hearing a suitable feminine exclamation, John saw a girl with the indications of his violence upon her dress which was drenched with tea.

"I'm most awfully sorry," he stammered. "Why your dress is sopping wet and it's all my fault." His handkerchief he used to wipe her costume and was on the point of using it to mop up the tea on the floor, when the waitress arrived with a rag more suitable for the purpose. "I'm awfully sorry," he kept on saying.

The girl was inclined to be a little annoyed, but one cannot be angry with a good-looking young man who is very apologetic, and obviously admiring you. So thought Elsie as she answered, "Please don't apologize any more. I'm sure you couldn't help it. After all, you did lend me your handkerchief." She smiled as she handed it back and he put it, as reverently as one would touch a relic, dripping wet into his pocket.


But one couldn't talk to a complete stranger forever, even if she is the prettiest girl in the world and has the most marvellous wavy hair and soft brown eyes. John wished that he could stay, but the waitress had mopped up the floor and brought a fresh cup of tea. It was time for him to go. So he apologized for the fourth time and went out with her beauty ringing in his head like a song.

Timidly yet eagerly John returned several times to that Lyons, with an honest intention than that with which he had haunted The Saracens. But the girl of the accident never came, though he lingered over his coffee until closing time several evenings a week, waiting and waiting for her. What John would have done if she had come he did not know. He couldn't very well knock another cup of tea in her lap, and it would be impossible frankly to say that he had come there for the special purpose of meeting her again. Perhaps the best plan would be to stimulate surprise and adopt the ancient convention of extraordinary coincidence.

Eventually he despaired of meeting her in the tea shop and searched the Kilburn High Road for her in vain. It could not happen that they would never cross each other's path again. These things, he was sure, were part of destiny; in an ultra-sentimental mood he told himself that her soul and his had been prepared for each other from their cradles—indeed before they were born!

And then, just as his eagerness was beginning to fail because of the hopelessness of his passion, John did meet the girl of the tea cup.

It had been a day of mild magnificence, such as England only knows, but with the fall of night ominous



clouds ringed the sky. Bradley loved the weather where rain rushed to battle with the clear heavens, both forces noble antagonists. Eagerly he put on a water-proof and went out for a walk.

He struck up from Golders Green through the maze of small shrubs and bushes, thinking how fine it was to stand here and look at the long circle of lights which lined the heath, and to gaze up to the wild and sudden sky and feel that on just such a night would Dick Turpin and his companions rein in by that clump of trees and wait for the lumbering mail coach. Hark! the clatter of hoofs far down that white road and axles which groaned with their burden. The coach creaks slowly into sight. A dark figure rides out from the clump of trees crying, "Hold and Deliver!"

The rain had begun to fall, a soft rain not too uncomfortable and setting off the wild spirit of romance. . . . Down the road was the inn and the good horse saddled in readiness, for presently there would be a thunder of horses out of London and a wild gallop northwards for a man's life. . . . Then the heavens broke and even highwaymen vanished in the drenching downpour.

John hastened to a clump of trees which he thought must have sheltered many a handsome desperado in times begone. If there was no romance now, at least there would be a useful roof of the heavy leaves against the weather. Romance lurked there in a way that John had not looked for. He lit his pipe and leaned patiently against the rough trunk and waited. There came a white sheet of lightning and a dull rumble of thunder. In the new and vivid world he saw a slender figure not ten yards from him under the next tree—the

Lyons girl! One does not wait for introductions in such a situation and he was soon by her side. It was obviously destiny.

"I spoilt a dress of yours a little while ago," he began, "let me save your dress this time. Will you take my waterproof?"

"And who are you?" said a voice from the darkness. (She knew very well who it was though she couldn't see his face.)

"Don't you remember my upsetting the tea all over you in that Lyons in Kilburn three weeks ago? It was awfully clumsy of me and I've had it on my mind ever since."

She couldn't pretend not to know now—especially as another flash revealed him standing with humble and eager eyes. She was even wetter than on the occasion of the unlucky adventure, her hair straggly and woe-begone.

"Of course I know you now. I'm sorry if I was a little cross then, because you *were* so distressed. But one can't be polite when one is sopping wet."

"But you're much wetter now," replied John.

"Yes, I know—but it doesn't seem so out of place here—though what I should do without your coat I don't know. It is good of you to give it to me. You poor boy, you're getting drenched to the skin."

"Oh, don't mind me—I'm so glad to have the chance of meeting you again."

Then there was a little pause, for after a particularly vivid flash and a crash sounding like the snapping of the world's axis, she instinctively drew nearer to him.

"You're not frightened, are you?" he whispered.

"No—at least—no, of course I'm not." She was



silent for a few moments; then spoke shyly, "How did you know me? I'm sure I look a fearful sketch—even in your coat."

John trembled a little but he rose to it manfully. "I'd know you anywhere," he said. There was a long silence and he went on, "I have been longing to see you again—but I knew that I should."

"How did you know?" she asked.

"Because—don't you see why?—because I loved you."

His arm was about her now and she did not resist. He kissed her cheek and it was wet with the rain. His lips and heart thrilled with the touch of it. She did not speak but clung closely to him like a frightened child. She had been kissed many times flirtatiously in light casual love-makings, but no one had ever kissed her as John kissed her. He was clumsy and full of fear of a new and wonderful sort, yet he found her cold wet hands, kissed them and held them against his breast. So they stood while the thunder raged and roared upon the vault of the world. Neither of them was sure what they ought to do next. At last, however, John, astonished at his own daring and shaken with the ecstasy of bliss, found her lips. They did not respond except to quiver at the touch. She cried a little and John felt as if he wanted to kiss her feet to console her. The rain dripped through the branches unheeded. Everything was erased from memory or consciousness during that hour, except for the boy the fact that he had found the girl he loved and for the girl the pride of being loved. She did not question him or her own heart. No defense or explanation appeared to be needed. Love was all that mattered.

So it happened that these two, John and Elsie,

climbed Box Hill one Sunday morning in April and sat in happy silence upon the grass, watching the world whirl about its useless business below them in the valley and beyond the further line of hills where London lay.

In the inn they lunched when the hour and the keen air had sharpened their appetites, and Endymion's mythic and Nelson's historic love, like their own love, seemed profaned by the crowd that gathered off the roads for food. A greasy Jew with his wife and son and daughter were eating voraciously and vociferously by the bay window. Their large yellow and black motor stood outside, watched over by its stolid driver, while inside the owners clinked champagne glasses noisily. Two or three groups of less affluent motorists were lunching in the room, a motor cyclist and his wife and half a dozen highly facetious members of a cycling club in addition to one or two isolated cyclists. John was in no mood for such society.

Lunch at an end, they lingered for an hour in the inn's lovely and sacred garden before pushing along the downs. The sunlight threw deep purple shadows upon the smooth sides of the hills and the air blew about the lovers' faces. John was stirred with elation and, unmindful of English traditions, sang aloud to the tune of the wind.

At the end of four or five miles they entered wide woods, great trees bursting into a foam of leaves and then plantations of saplings full of larches with their delicate frondage. Among the woods they found a spot, some distance from the road, where a stream gurgled over the stones, and there they sat down. Bluebells whose bright hue moved as the flowers swayed with the gentlest of motions, spread at their feet in every direction, like Italian skies fallen and broken

into fragments. John again spread his raincoat on the ground and drew Elsie down beside him, leaning with her against the trunk of a tremendous oak. She disturbed his rapture by drawing away from his arm.

"Don't, John, don't!" she cried almost piteously.

"My darling, what is it?" the boy said, turning to her anxiously.

She was silent for a few minutes, trembling. Calming herself with a strong effort of will, she asked, "John, will you let me talk to you?"

Several times previously she had begun to open her subject like this; and though the boy was always disquieted, he knew from experience that his disquiet was unnecessary. There would be talk, tears often, and always a result which left Elsie penitent and subdued. Yet these scenes, though he invariably emerged from them triumphant, shook his confidence in himself. So he answered, concealing his concern: "Poor little Elsie, what is it now?" His arm went round her again and the girl did not resist. "I suppose you are upset because you don't know much about Keats."

Elsie sighed a little and replied with some impatience, "Oh, you don't understand, John dear. It isn't Keats at all. But we're not suited to one another."

At once protestations, vigorous and even violent came from John. He told Elsie, truly enough, that she was the only girl he had ever loved, and then, remembering Tennyson, quoted the line about the maiden passion for a maid and its subtle mastery. He loved her with all his might and every power of his soul. His mind was colored and stamped with the impress of his love for her. All true, or nearly as true, as he believed his declarations to be.

She went on again wearily and warily. "It isn't that, John, you dear darling. I know you love me—but I'm not your sort, if you only knew me."

Again the boy burst in impetuously until she stopped him, "Oh, you mustn't think I don't like being loved by you. I love it. But it won't do. Something more is necessary. You see I'm not educated. I'm a typist on twenty-two and sixpence a week and my father is a builder's foreman—Don't, John!"

Her last exclamation was occasioned by John putting his arm round her neck, first stopping her mouth with his hand and then stopping her mouth with kisses. This was an old story.

Elsie was the only daughter of an occasionally, very occasionally, drunken father, kindly to his family and able in his work, who, though he was practically illiterate himself, had become the right-hand man of his employers and had risen considerably above his station. Elsie, after leaving the council schools, had passed to a business training college for shorthand and typing and so had lifted her family still higher in the social scale. But she was fully conscious of her own educational and social limitations. She had brains, but her cultural limitations made her look with some fear upon John's love for her. Marriage, she assured him, could only be a tragedy.

John was not such a fool as to deny the difference between himself and Elsie, in education, or in social position. Secretly he thought he was rather noble in ignoring these differences, but such thoughts he checked as unworthy. Her own candor in the matter he admired. She was wrong but she was brave. To Elsie he declared that the differences were not important.

"Elsie darling," he cried, "how can you talk about these things. We love one another. That is enough. What do these differences matter?"

The girl, shrewder in the affairs of the world and more candid to her own soul than John was capable of being, said, "These differences lead on to so many other things which *are* important. Even what you say doesn't matter, may come to matter. It would break my heart if one day, when we were married, you threw my father in my face or the council school. I tell myself about them, but I don't want you to tell——"

"As if I ever would! Why in the things that really count you are miles above me!"

The girl smiled sadly and a momentary maternity stirred in her, moving her doubting heart towards her impetuous lover.

"No, I don't think you would, John. But all the same it would be awful to feel that you *might*. Here you are with your head full of poetry and I didn't know that Keats wrote Endymion!"

"You'll have time to learn, my darling," John answered.

"But I don't want to learn it, John. Don't you see I'm not sufficiently interested in it. I might to please you; but that's not good enough."

There was silence. John mechanically stroked the sleeve of Elsie's coat; but he was disquieted a moment. When he spoke it was to say slowly, "Dear little Elsie, love is all that matters. We have that; don't let us bother about——"

"But have we?" the girl asked, interrupting his unfinished sentence. "Can we really love one another properly when there are all these differences between——"

John now interrupted with a vehement torrent of vows. "To show of how little consequence these, what you call differences, are, I tell you that I love you, that I love you. Trifles like these are burnt up, swept away. They might matter, they would matter if I didn't love you so much, but——"

Elsie shook her head. "You're a dear, dear boy. You are educated, I am not. You are a gentleman; I am not a lady." John began to protest. "Hear what I have to say," she went on, "you love poetry and all that. I don't care much for it. Sometimes I've pretended to be interested to please you; but I don't really care much about it. You say that doesn't matter. Very well, we'll say they don't matter. *This* does—you are fearfully religious and I——"

"Do I look as if I were fearfully religious?" John asked, smiling and patting her cheek. "If I were religious I'd go to Church or Chapel, instead of which here am I spending Sunday walking about with you."

"Then that proves that I am not religious either." John was nonplussed by feminine logic and laughed.

"You have to laugh. You know I'm right," said Elsie. "I'm not religious and you are—though you don't go to Church or Chapel. But you're always thinking about God."

John grew suddenly solemn. "I am, or I was always thinking about God—and I've found Him in you."

Elsie laughed in her turn. "John, you *are* ridiculous! You won't find God in me—or anything very good."

The man's soul grew taut with passion. "You, Elsie," he cried, his eyes flashing, "you, why, you're goodness itself."

She put her hand on his in deprecation, but he went on, "Why, when everything seemed to be gone, my faith

in life and my hope in it were dying until you came along! You are my saint!" He kissed her hand. "My religion!" and he held her in his arms and kissed her lips again and again. "Don't you see what you are to me, Elsie?" he cried, greatly moved. "You are the breath of my soul!"

The girl kissed and clung to him. "My poor John," she sobbed, a tear rolling down her cheek. "Your soul can't live on me. You will find me out and where will you be? I know myself better than you do, my dearest. You have persuaded yourself that——" she broke off suddenly and cried like a child. "You are wanting God and you think you have found Him in me. But you haven't! I will never be able to satisfy you."

"Darling, my dearest darling," John cried, "you will marry me and then you will see. Nothing else on earth can satisfy me. My dear little Elsie!"

"My dear little John," she sobbed in return. Then putting her hand up to her neck she drew out the gold chain hanging there, reaching down into the bosom of her blouse, until she found a ring which she drew out. In the twilight a diamond glittered like a point of fire. That ring she never wore at home except in bed, for it would have angered her father. John released the clasp of the chain and put the ring upon her engagement finger, as the flowers closed for the night and as the first pale star was lit like a taper in the sky.

## **PART II**





## CHAPTER I

**M**ICHAEL DONOVAN stood by the Marble Arch where he, along with John Bradley and Maurice Cregan, had met House by appointment, and sweeping his arms towards the clusters of people round the various orators occupying their various rostrums, cried to his friends, "Here is a proof that what most interests men is religion!" They had idled half an hour away before starting to walk along the north side of Hyde Park towards that Bayswater Square in which House and his family lived. The day was swelteringly hot, but though the preachers perspired freely, martyrs to the truth, and attention was only languid, they went on with undiminished fervor. Here one gentleman, with a round rubicund face that appeared to be in imminent danger of melting in the torrid sun, proved point by point (to the intense satisfaction of his hearers) that the infernal regions consisted of ice, not fire. A negro, at the next pitch, was arguing with extraordinary volubility that the earth was flat. Further on were a cadaverous melancholy gentleman, who was engaged in exposing the manufacturers of patent medicines; a dowdy old lady, who by means of charts and little models could demonstrate that the pyramids proved the inspiration of the Bible; a blind man playing dreary tunes on a portable harmonium to which his wife sang doggerel hymns, and a Scotch atheist with a raucous voice who denied very energetically the immortality of the soul.

When Michael Donovan cried, "Here is a proof that what most interests men is religion," House answered, "True, Donovan, and religion is the thing that most often drives men mad. *Here* are your proofs."

The Irishman laughed, as was his way when House fell into his traps. "Well," he said, "here are four men. Let us test it. We will each say in turn, in a single sentence, what we believe and then we will argue as we walk to House's house—of which Willie Yeats has finely said:

"'House of all houses, house of all the world.' We are the world. Come, let us state our creeds. Begin, Cregan."

A baleful light of irony gleamed for a second in the fierce eye of the Ulsterman, and he answered, "Hell."

"Very good, Cregan," commented House.

"Not quite satisfying, however logically cogent," Donovan went on. "Now Bradley."

John turned bright red all over, but he answered bravely, "I believe in love."

House smiled, and Maurice Cregan became profanely mirthful. He turned on John. "Sentimental ass! Who's the lucky lady?"

House checked this vulgar cynicism, saying, "Leave him alone, Cregan. You have no right to criticize. You've never been in love and I'll swear that nobody has been in love with your ugly face. Now as a married man, I say that even if love dies——"


"No speeches yet, House," put in Donovan. "Tell us what you believe in."

"I disbelieve most things," the genial giant answered. "But the one most certain thing in life is, as Karl Marx said, that the economic is the determining factor."

"Well, to the damnable Calvinist, the Amorisist, and the Materialist creeds," said Michael, "I add my own: I believe in God. I think we have stated the matter clearly; now all that remains is to argue about it. Come, let us begin."

A four-handed debate between excitable young men walking abreast along a public road is not an easy thing to manage, especially when all the parties want to speak, and in fact do speak, at the same time. Out of a vociferous clash of tongues, one thread of debate eventually became disentangled, the ancient, never concluded debate between House and Donovan. The older of the two friends, House, at first carried everything before him, roaring out like a bull and dashing, also like a bull, his huge angry head against every red rag of argument that the subtler Donovan threw before his feet. Controversy between them invariably began like a bull fight, the nimble matador running round his antagonist, pricking the hide of the beast and leaping over its back. Yet it could hardly be said that the beast was ever killed; it was exhausted of its first fury, but it was never conquered.

The impact was a wonderful sight, the large gestures of House, his tremendous voice, his coarse energy. Donovan, keeping cool, amused himself with infuriating his opponent, leaving to him all the sound, reserving all the sense. Then, when House was at last tamed into comparative docility, Michael Donovan began. On and on he went, his clear, metallic voice ringing with a compelling eloquence, in which poetry and passion and scholarship were closely mingled together. His talk had, however, the disadvantage of being imperialistic in its demands. Once Michael had fairly started he could not easily be stopped. For twenty consecutive



minutes he spoke unchecked, and then during a pause while the orator was taking breath to begin again, Maurice ventured to say, "That's all very well, Donovan, but——" Instantly he was turned on by the speaker, in whose face indignation strove with humor and was victorious. "Man," shouted Michael, "for God's sake let me get a word in edgeways!"

After that Maurice dropped behind with John. One could not argue four-abreast, and just as House monopolized the beginning so Donovan monopolized the end of the debate. "Come, John," Cregan said, "you and I will start something on our own account. Let House and Michael walk on in front."

John dropped behind with Cregan, who began, "I'm an unsympathetic sort of devil about love—and when it comes to love being a religion, good Lord, I give it up. Of course I've known you were sighing your heart out after some little lady—and that's all right, though it's not in my line—but where does the *religion* come in, old fellow?"

In front of them, ten or twelve yards away, walked the two older men, down the avenue of thick trees, Michael's voice rising and falling like the wind that stirred among the branches. Only here and there could those following catch a word, but they were affected by the sheer verbal music of Donovan's voice and spoke softly.

"Maurice," said John, "I had a horrible time a year ago. I was intensely unhappy. You seem to be able to do without emotional comfort in your life; I cannot. You could believe in God and yet not love Him. I couldn't, and consequently I suffered the tortures of the damned. There was no help for me; no one to whom I could turn."

House, in front, being by now reduced to a proper state of submission, was allowed once more to take part in the discussion. His louder tones reached them. "On all practical points we agree," he was saying, "though we differ when it comes to theory. Now the confessional——"

The rest of the sentence was drowned in a motor bus that rumbled past on the Bayswater Road, and John went on again:


"She is the loveliest girl in the——"

"Of course she is, my dear chap. You needn't tell me that. I've never seen her but I know enough about her to admit the point."

Bradley knew his companion too well to be offended by his impatience.

"Then I met her, Cregan, and the whole universe seemed to be full of love. I seem in my love for her to be loving God, for she was the salvation of my soul. My love is the solution of all riddles, the——"

It will never be known to what heights of eloquence John Bradley's enthusiasm would have carried him; for he was interrupted by the two men in front turning to the right towards a gate that led out of the Park into the road. Donovan once again was speaking; drawing level they heard him clearly. "The deepest spiritual desire of the heart (if we except the desire for God, to which indeed that desire is related) is the hopeless longing for our lost innocence. Bodily passions pull the spirit this way and that, but even the body hungers for virginity more than for experience. Few know it until they have tasted of the fruit of the tree of good and evil; all know it then when it is too late. Chastity, which is a mystical virtue, is a practical necessity, like all the apparently impossible evan-



gelical counsels. You are a socialist, House, but will your dry old Marxian theory of the economic being the determining factor inspire anyone as the love of holy poverty has inspired men? You are a revolutionary, and you call for a new Christ to offer himself in blood and tears upon the altar of the world. Who will do it except in the obedience which cries, 'I pray thee let this cup pass from me; nevertheless thy will not mine be done.'"

A hush fell upon the little group of listeners, for not only the words of Donovan but the spiritual fervor which moved him, took possession of his companions. The orator was seized and shaken by his own passion, which he imparted to his audience; as they threaded their way through the roads leading down to House's home none dared to speak.

Donovan at last broke the silence. He had been carried away by his own emotion, but though he was an artist he hated and loathed anything like artistic posturings. Deliberately he broke the spell which he himself had cast. "Did you ever," he asked Cregan, "hear my story about the sergeant-major?"

"No," Maurice answered. "What was it?"

"Well, it was Sunday morning and the men of the regiment were forming into companies according to their religions to attend their various places of worship. There were the Church of England men, and the Catholics, and the Wesleyans, and the Baptists, and the Congregationalists standing in their separate groups. When the sergeant-major saw one little fellow who had joined none of the groups. 'Hi, you!' he shouted at him, 'God damn you; haven't you got any religion?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Well, why don't you fall in, then?' 'Please sir, I'm a Plymouth Brother,' the timid little recruit

replied. The sergeant-major scratched his puzzled head. This was a problem. But it had to be solved. 'You'd better fall in with the Roman Catholics.'

The three men laughed until Donovan checked their mirth. "You think that incongruous? I tell you that the sergeant-major was a profound theologian. The Plymouth Brethren are the only non-Catholic body that hold the Catholic tradition of giving the most important place in worship to the Holy Eucharist. That's why I told you the story."

The four friends had arrived at the door of their host's dwelling place, and House took a key from his pocket and let them in. For a socialist's house it was luxurious, designed for comfort rather than for artistic display. The excellent carpets, the soft deep chairs did not bespeak the idealist ready to be crucified for his ideals. House seemed to be aware of this and jested at himself for the apparent contradiction between his principles and his practice. "Of course, my boys, I shall have to give all this up when the revolution comes, but until then I intend to keep it all. Then I'll give it up gladly." He spoke sincerely, for the man was, despite his affectations of cynicism, despite his professed materialistic philosophy, a pure enthusiast. That the economic is the determining factor, an aphorism constantly in his mouth, was never in his heart. His criticism of the world and of other men was in flat opposition to the thing he claimed to believe most strongly.

A chance visitor might have been amused at the bodily comfort with which this socialist mystic surrounded himself. What was especially amusing to John was to see the number of pictures of Napoleon hung about the rooms. He was looking at one of these prints



when House slapped him on the back, exclaiming, "Wonderful man!" John turned round and noticed for the first time the fact that House's own face bore a great resemblance to the face of the Emperor. Lord Northcliffe also had, he recollected, something of the same type of face, though like House he was a bigger man than Napoleon in body. He also had been inspired by that facial similarity and had modelled himself so far as possible upon the hero he resembled. House was built on a much larger scale than Alfred Harmsworth and lacked that touch of Oscar Wilde which makes Northcliffe's pose slightly ridiculous and highly successful. Bradley was entertained by House's naïve enthusiasm. "Yes, House," he replied to his friend's outburst, "a very wonderful man. By the way, when the revolution comes and you are in the socialist cabinet what title are you going to take?"

House had sufficient humor to be amused by his own vain idiosyncrasy and, as John Bradley was aware, sufficient good humor to enjoy the thrust at his own dignity. His eyes sparkled as he replied, "Normanhurst or Normanville; I'm not sure which. What do *you* think, Bradley?"

Just then Mrs. House came down the stairs to greet her guests, and her husband whispered to John, "Don't say anything more about that before my wife. She takes it seriously. She doesn't care a rap about Socialism but she does want to be Lady Normanhurst or Normanville—one day."

"Then you'd better let *her* settle which of the two titles it shall be," John whispered as Mrs. House came towards them. She was a plump, motherly little person, several years older than the man she had married and whom she adored and who gave her in return a

somewhat casual affection. House was a kind but by no means uxorious husband, though he invariably spoke of his wife with respect and even admiration—tributes she most decidedly deserved.

"Isn't he wonderful?" she asked John as they went towards the dining-room.

"He was," John replied, smiling secretly at this domestic Napoleonic *cultus*. "A pity that they mewed him up at St. Helena, at the end," he added inconsequently.

"Oh, I don't mean Napoleon, but Mr. House. Though I always think of him as the modern Napoleon. Don't you see the resemblance between them?"

John answered as gravely as he could that the resemblance she mentioned was very strongly marked.

"Do you know, Mr. Bradley," she confided to him, "my husband laughs at me when I say it, but it makes me believe in the transmigration of souls. Not only in his face but in *every* way!"

Whether or no House were an exact facsimile of Napoleon, his lavish hospitality might be said to be on the Napoleonic scale, and the dinner he had provided for his friends could have appeared without shame in Versailles. His own appetite for food was noble, but it was simple and for himself he would have been quite contented with a plate of steak and onions and a quart of beer. But when he had to entertain, his generosity compelled him to provide his guests with elaborate dishes and costly wines, of which he ate and drank with gusto, and which the poor men he often invited to his table ate and drank with embarrassment. A very fine quality in him was his utter inability to judge men by their wealth, their education or their manners. The only thing that mattered to him was

whether the men were what he called "good fellows."

In order to lessen if he could the extravagant veneration with which his wife pestered him, House told a story against himself of how at the House of Commons (he was not a Member, but he spent a large part of his time there) he and a certain peer got into an argument on Socialism in the smoking room. "Mr. House," this nobleman had said, "I'd like to talk with you again about this. I'm interested when a man like you is a socialist. Will you lunch with me tomorrow?"

To this invitation House replied, "I'll lunch with you on one condition."

"And what is that?"

"That I choose the restaurant and the lunch."

The noble lord agreed to the conditions and met House the next day, and was taken by him to a small, select and fabulously expensive restaurant near Sloane Square. "I ordered the lunch," said House, "and believe me, it was 'some' lunch. There are only three men in London who know as much about food as I do. One is a chef, one is a parson, and one is a cabinet minister. Well, we ate the lunch and talked and I chose the wines. When the bill was made and handed to my host it was for eight pounds, seven and sixpence. He looked at me and then at the bill, and said, 'Mr. House, you may be a socialist in your opinions, but you're a bloody aristocrat in your tastes.'"

Soon after dinner Mrs. House, who had no patience with the masculine propensity to argue, made an excuse to leave them, so House took his guests to the smoking room, ordering liqueurs, coffee and cigars to be sent up.

"I have," he said to John Bradley, "sixteen different kinds of liqueurs in the house. Which will you have?"

John had never tasted a liqueur in his life before, but he would not display his ignorance, and so asked, at a venture, for Green Chartreuse.

"You remind me, my boy," said House, "of a Catholic priest Donovan once brought here. He sat there in the same chair you're sitting in and like you he drank Green Chartreuse. We had a full bottle and we argued about religion. Every time I got him into a corner he refilled his glass and said 'Cheero,' and drank it off. This went on until half-past two in the morning, and there were about two more glasses of Green Chartreuse left in the bottle."

On this occasion the conviviality of debate was increased not only by drink but by song, for Michael Donovan made a heartily applauded proposition that the company should compose a drinking song to stand as an eternal monument to their meeting. House had just bellowed out an ancient West of England ballad which had a countless number of verses, and a chorus with the appropriate sentiments of:

"With my row-ti-oodly-oodly-oodly;  
Row-ti-oodly-ow!"

John was highly strung up when Michael pushed him to the piano and ordered him to play. "You, Bradley," he said, "shall have the privilege of writing the first verse. That is given on condition that you compose the tune. If you won't accept the condition I will compose the tune——"

"In order to escape that, I'll compose it, Donovan," said John, hastily seating himself. "I think I can manage the tune—but the verse I'm not so sure about."

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"Rot, Bradley; as if my critical eye doesn't know a poet when it sees one. Come, own up, haven't you written verses?"

John blushed. He had written sonnets for Elsie which she greatly admired but which he was too shy to show to anyone else.

"There. I thought so. And you, Cregan?"

Maurice denied it at first, but, on being pressed, confessed that he had once written a hymn.

"And a damn bad hymn, too, I'll bet," commented Donovan. "Never mind; you stand convicted. What about you, House? You have a youthful epic in a secret drawer somewhere, I'm sure."

House, however, violently protested, not without oaths, that he had never written poetry and did not intend to write poetry. "It's all very fine. You're a poet by trade and you can't expect those who know nothing about that trade——"

Donovan cut him short. "Trade? My dear House," he said witheringly, "poetry isn't a trade, it's an art. I don't expect every man to be able to make a table; that's the business of specialists. But I do expect every man to be able to make a poem; that's the business of every normal man. That's why John Bradley is going to make a verse to the tune he will compose, and why each one of us will make a verse afterwards."

John spent the ten minutes allotted to him, scribbling a few lines on the back of an envelope and playing several experimental chords on the piano. Then he shouted in great excitement, "Here, you fellows! I've got it. Be ready to follow."

To a simple but effective air he sang the words he had written:

"When Horace wrote his noble verse,  
 His brilliant, glowing line,  
 He must have gone to bed with the worse  
 For good Falernian wine;  
 No poet yet could praise the rose  
 In verse that so serenely flows,  
 Unless he tinged his Roman nose  
 In good Falernian wine."

Then he added the chorus:

*Shakespeare and Jonson too  
 Drank deep of Barley Brew;  
 Drank deep of barley brew, my boys,  
 Drank deep of barley brew.*

"Very good, Bradley," said Donovan approvingly.  
 "Your second and sixth lines were padding, but that  
 may be pardoned. Are you ready, Cregan?"

Maurice had his stanza written by the time that  
 John's verse had been sung through for the second,  
 and the chorus for the first time. In a plain, strong,  
 not unpleasing, voice he began:

"When Alexander led his men  
 Against the Persian king,  
 He broached a hundred hogsheads, then  
 They drank like anything.  
 They drank by day, they drank by night,  
 And when they marshaled for the fight,  
 Each put a score of foes to flight—  
 Then drank like anything!

*No warrior worth his salt,  
 But quaffs the mighty malt,  
 But quaffs the mighty malt, my boys,  
 But quaffs the mighty malt."*

"I apologize about your hymn, Cregan," was

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Michael's comment. "It must have been damn good."

House was then told that he must make his contribution, but he asseverated his inability "for the poetic line" as strongly as he knew how, so Michael Donovan, having uttered a protest against the broken pact, sucked his pipe for a few minutes and then rose with his verse ready:

"When Patrick into Ireland went  
The works of God to do,  
It was his excellent intent  
To teach men how to brew.  
The holy saint had in his train  
A man of splendid heart and brain—  
A brewer was this worthy swain—  
To teach men how to brew.

*The snakes he drove away  
Were teetotalers they say,  
Teetotalers they say, my boys,  
Teetotalers they say!"*

This was too much for House, who roared out, "Drag your blasted religion into the song, will you? I'm not a Protestant, but I'll show you the other side. Give me a pencil!" Taking the fountain pen Michael offered him, the wrathful House, looking, as John said, like a public house on a Saturday night, retired into a corner and wrote:

"When Martin Luther....."

There he stuck. To help himself out he set the chorus down, or as much of it as he could think of:

.....  
.....

..... my boys,  
.....

At last, admitting with sorrow that he wasn't a poet, he gave up his task in despair.

They all laughed loudly at House's uncompleted line, and Michael turned to the unsuccessful poet. "I'll finish it for you."

"You?" said House, incredulously.

"Yes, I will; why shouldn't a Catholic give Luther his due. Listen!"

John at the piano began the accompaniment, to which Donovan sang:

"When Martin Luther broke his vows  
And mocked the Church's ban,  
And took a faithless nun as spouse—  
He still could drain the can,  
Although a lewd and loathsome beast,  
He kept one virtue, at the least,  
At fair or fellowship or feast—  
He still could drain the can.

*"But Protestants now think  
There's sin in Christian drink,  
There's sin in Christian drink, my boys,  
There's sin in Christian drink.*

The singer's voice ceased singing and spoke instead: "It's just as well for you, House, you horrible heretic, that you couldn't get any further—or I'd write yet another verse in praise of the monastic orders that have given us Benedictine"—he lifted a tiny glass, in which a liquid globe of green gleamed like the eye of a cat; then added with a bow to his host, "and Char-treuse!"



## CHAPTER II

**T**HERE was about Michael Donovan as he walked leisurely along the West End Lane, making for John's lodging in Golders Green, a somewhat preoccupied air. But his thoughts did not make him look less alert, despite the oblivion in which all things around him were immersed; on the contrary his face bore an eager and even an exalted expression. The long, lean, lithe Irishman could not help seeming to be what he was in fact—a poet, for though he hated æsthetic attitudinizings, though he always acted upon his theory that art must be no more than a by-product of life, he carried with him an atmosphere of romance. There was gaiety and challenge in all his movements; and more than one passer-by turned to watch the easy splendor of his carriage, thinking that Donovan was an extremely handsome man. This, however, Donovan was not, for his nose, his chin and his eyes spoke of power rather than of beauty.

There was a similarity of type between his features and Maurice Cregan's, along with a strongly differentiating quality; for though Maurice had, on a lesser scale, a build not unlike that of Michael, his high cheek bones, his lantern jaw, and his deep brooding eyes never made his ugly face anything more than striking. He had, in short, Michael's pugnacity without his romanticism. These two men each had a good deal of the eagle in them. In Cregan the eagle was chained, in Donovan free—so free that what was made fierce by captivity in Maurice became in Michael swift and brilliant.

There was no hint of the morose in this young man

as he sauntered along; if one felt that he could be fierce upon occasion one was rather more conscious of the gentle tenderness in him.

John was waiting for his friend with an impatience that was mingled with shyness. He gave to Donovan an admiration approaching hero worship, but at the same time he could not help standing a little in awe of him. So that when Michael rang the bell at Mrs. Chambers' door, John experienced a fear of his own ardor.

There were in his sitting room several things about of which Bradley felt shy, especially before Donovan. Since Michael's last visit to these "diggings," John had set up on the mantelpiece a plaster of paris statue of the Mother of God with her Divine Child in her arms. Already it had been the subject of contention. Maurice Cregan had spoken of it with such bitter contempt that a dangerous breach between him and John had nearly been effected. That had been healed with a compromise of silence. Mrs. Chambers also had protested against "popish and heathenish idols" being brought into her house. She had eventually yielded so far as to allow it to stay, though when tidying the room each morning she sniffed before the image and could never bring herself to dust it. "Touch not, taste not, handle not," she quoted, somewhat inconsequently, as a justification of her own position in the matter.

John did not object to debating the point with Mrs. Chambers or with Maurice. He recognized that they were, by the necessities of their Protestantism, obliged to condemn the least apparent approach towards idols; and he admitted inwardly (he refused to do so outwardly) that there might be a touch of mawkish sentimentality about this, as about the majority of such

statues. Catholic truth is one thing and Catholic taste another.

With Michael Donovan a new situation would arise. He would be certain to be far more interested in the truth than in the taste of the question. He would not discuss the artistic value of the little plaster cast but only its spiritual value. There would come a light in his eye when he saw it, even if he made no comment, and he would take it as a symbol of the soul.

Knowing this, and so as not to give Michael the opportunity of saying anything by way of look or word, John determined, as he brought his guest up to the room, to take the bull by the horns. He did so rather timorously, taking up the statue and beginning, "Jolly little thing, this, Donovan; I got it for half a crown at Burns & Oates."

Michael took the plaster cast and looked at it without speaking, a queer questioning glitter in his eye. Then he lifted his head and asked, "How long have you had it, Bradley?"

"Let me see," said John with affected carelessness. "Didn't I have it here, when you came before?"

Michael smiled at the elementary hypocrisy and answered, "No, I'm sure not."

"Oh, well," John went on, still hypocritical, cursing himself meanwhile for his clumsiness and knowing himself to be seen through by Donovan. "Oh, well, it must have been just after you were here."

Michael got up from his chair and put the figures back upon the mantelpiece. "I suppose you think it makes a nice decoration, Bradley."

Color ran up into John's cheeks; but he plunged on more boldly into confession.

"Oh, no, Donovan," he said, "you may think I'm a sentimental ass——"

"Why should I?" Michael put in.

John ignored the interruption. "That's not my reason for having it here at all. You know I'm not a Catholic, but I'd like to be one, though I don't think I ever could be one." There was a pause. "I say the rosary now, Michael."

The Irishman went off into laughter. Then he said, "You mustn't think I'm laughing at you, John. It's a story you reminded me of. Shall I tell it to you?"

John expressed his wish to hear it, so Michael continued. "At the time of the Oxford Movement a certain man was on the point of joining the Catholic Church. His friends tried to persuade him not to do so, and so far prevailed upon him as to get him to consent to lay his difficulties before Pusey. At the close of a long interview Pusey said, 'May I ask you a question?' 'Certainly,' was the response. 'Do you say the Rosary?' Pusey's visitor admitted that he did. 'Ah, I thought so!' said Pusey. 'I have known it fatal in so many cases.'"

Their laughter had not died away when Mrs. Chambers entered with their dinner. The two men sat down at the table before an open window through which they could see the sun setting in a sea of gold on the plain sloping away from the heights where they were. Even the liver and bacon which was all that the niggardly Mrs. Chambers allowed for the extra charge of half-a-crown she made for each of John's guests, appeared a pleasant meal that summer evening, and the two men talked as they ate their stinted food and drank a vile brand of bottled beer.

John apologized for his hospitality. "She is like all the Welsh," he explained to his guest, "very religious, very courteous in behavior—but my God! avaricious, treacherous and lecherous!"

Mrs. Chambers came in again, smooth of tongue and crafty of eye, still bearing some ruin of that beauty which (so scandal said) worked an evil not untainted with blood before a young English cornchandler took her from her Welsh hills, accepting, in ignorance, her child as his own. Their marriage only lasted for five years, terminating in a fatal tram accident for Mr. Chambers. His widow had lived upon the proceeds of the insurance supplemented by the spoils of a succession of lodgers for twenty years. For the greater part of that time her respectability as a wife and widow was fortified by a strict adherence to the pure doctrines of Meltonianism.

She came in to gather up the dirty plates and the remains of the liver and bacon (presently to be consumed by herself in the kitchen) and to bring in what she called the "pudding"—in reality a jam tart.

"Ah, Mr. Donovan," she said, putting the tart in front of John, "you'll be making a Roman Catholic of Mr. Bradley with your graven images and your fine talk."

Michael smiled. "I'm afraid that it will take a good deal more than that to make Mr. Bradley a Catholic, Mrs. Chambers."

"Well, I don't mean any offense to you, but you Jesuits are such a clever people."

"I'm sure it's not offensive to be called clever," Donovan answered, "and between ourselves, Mrs. Chambers," he went on, "I don't like the Jesuits."

John's landlady was so pleased with the assurance

that she nearly added coffee to the scanty menu. Economy and the consideration that Mr. Bradley would not be expecting it, however, made her change her mind, and the two men in the sitting room upstairs were left undisturbed to their talk.

They lit their pipes and Michael lay at full length on the settee while John curled himself up into the coils most characteristic of him, among the soft cushions of a huge chair. He felt angry with Mrs. Chambers, first at the parsimonious meal provided for his guest and then at her complaisant good-humor in their recent conversation; but tobacco and the failing twilight comforted his mind.

His own eyes were hid from Donovan's in the dusk, so feeling less ill at ease in that concealment he began again upon the interrupted trend of talk.

"Donovan," he said, "Mrs. Chambers thinks I shall become a Catholic. That's nothing, because she's always suspicious of popish machinations and intrigues, but you also appeared to think it."

Michael suddenly sat up on the settee and blew a great cloud of smoke from his mouth before speaking. "I'm not wishing to press you for confidences——"

"Oh, but I'm ready to give them," John answered without waiting for Michael to finish his sentence. "Half of me is fighting towards it and half against it. Do you understand?"

Michael lay back again, his eyes closed and his pipe between his strong teeth. So he waited for John to continue.

"Do you know, Donovan," the younger man went on, "what is my great attraction towards your religion? It is the correspondence and correlation I see between Catholicism and human love. You know I began with a

sort of agnostic asceticism—asceticism for its own sake—and I broke under it. One cannot (so I see now) scourge oneself towards the love of God; but if one loves one is scourged. In the whole nature of things love is ascetic. The soul for the sake of one passion strips itself of all others.”

Donovan then replied, “I don’t think that you should speak like this until you are married, Bradley. You can’t possibly know enough about it. However, it’s no good my telling you so. Continue.”

John uncurled himself and sat bolt upright in his chair, greatly excited. “I believe that you are wrong now, Donovan. Nearly always you are right, but not now. Experience misleads as much as she teaches; and the lover can learn more in an hour of illumination than in a year of monotonous marriage. My marriage will, I believe with all my heart, be happy. But whatever the actuality may be, the ideal of love has brought me back to God. You remember what you were saying that day we were going to House’s, about virginity being the deepest desire of the soul? Well, that’s why I’ve put up our Lady there. There is no point in desiring virginity until one is in love. The great paradox is that one is in love with the very thing one is bound to destroy. Because love is broken in love, I have to set up a spiritual type to which the material may conform. Because the virginity I love is perishable by the fact that I love it, I have to find an imperishable virginity.”

“You flaming mystic!” Michael Donovan said, full of genuine admiration.

John ignored the complimentary comment. “Take the sacraments. God is not afraid of material things. He turns them into sacraments and in the hands of the

priest bread and wine and oil and water become channels for His grace to flow into the soul. If God can become embraced by the transubstantiation of a wheaten wafer, cannot He become—is it blasphemy to say so—transubstantiated in other material ways? May not the soul pass to divinity by any one or by all of the five gates of the body?”

“But do you believe in the Sacraments of the Catholic Church, John,” Michael asked.

“No,” said John slowly. “I don’t, not yet. I shall if I can prove that a correspondence exists between those sacraments and the sacraments of love. I am gradually proving that correspondence. When it is complete I shall believe in the Church’s sacraments in order to believe in love. Am I heretical?”

“Well, since you ask me, Bradley, I should say No. You are correct enough in your end but I am a little dubious over the means. It seems to me you are reversing the process. I as a Catholic believe that heavenly truth has a terrestrial corroboration, but the idea of a series of correlations is borrowed by you, consciously or unconsciously, from Catholic doctrine. The true statement of the case is that earth is a symbol of heaven, the mortal of the immortal, and that man is made in the image of God. But you are making the sacred the symbol of the secular. And when you do that you are fairly certain to miss some of the links of correspondence. Your chain will snap, unless you pick it up at the other end.”

They were both silent after this for a full five minutes, smoking in the increasing darkness. At last Donovan said, “You have told me things that I know you would not say to Cregan——”

“Or to any other man,” John added.



"I am grateful for the honor," Michael returned. "Let me repay it by saying what I in turn would never tell Cregan. I wouldn't tell him simply because he would not believe me." Donovan drew his legs up on the settee and clasped his knees against his body, before continuing in a quiet dreamy voice, "You know, Bradley, or you ought to know, that the road of mysticism is perhaps the most dangerous the soul can tread. It is the most dangerous because it rises to altitudes where one slip means destruction. The mystic falls so easily into the abyss of skepticism. Or he can lose his way and be snared by devils. Now you are a mystic, and though I see that your grasp of the staff of asceticism will, in all probability, keep your feet from slipping, there is no harm in my warning you of your danger." The speaker paused.

"The particular path up which you are climbing, however, is not nearly so arduous or perilous as the one I climbed. You will believe when you can see. You seek illumination and you mount upon an ascending scale of corollaries. If you faithfully discipline your emotions and your intellect and your will—all three together—you will find a belief that is consummated by sight. My case was different. 'Blessed are they who believe and have not seen'—I had to disbelieve what I had seen."

John leaned forward in the darkness and, as he did so, Michael made a movement on the settee. He was coiling himself up closer, becoming more like a spring, taut and intent.

The quiet voice continued. "The Irish, my own people, who had in some ways a good deal of Christianity ages before the coming of the Faith, who are the only Christian nation left in the world, are also curiously

enough still tintured in their blood—not in their philosophy—with the wild poetry of paganism. This does them good and not harm when the Faith is powerful among them. But there is a type of intellectual Irishman who, simply because of his acute sense of the supernatural, is inclined to leave the hard reasoning of Catholic dogma (which is cautious of an unbalanced supernaturalism) for one or other of those mystical cults whose claims to a direct supernaturalism are not circumscribed by a definite creed . . . I was one of that type.

“From a child I was a visionary. Blake did not see the face of God more clearly than I did. My father used to laugh at the things I said, looking upon them as instances of the quaint imagination of the child. I knew that he did not believe in their reality. My mother more or less encouraged me and I grew up (quite a jolly, hearty little boy on the whole, I am told) with my head and heart full of what my elders considered to be ‘fancies’ and what I knew to be visions. But when I was old enough to go to my first confession, the priest to whom I recounted these matters (quite naturally and taking such experiences to be normal) was by no means encouraging. He was an excellent old man, very sensible and pious, but he had no sympathy with my imaginations and disapproved altogether of my visions.

“The result was that until I became eighteen and went to Trinity College I lived a dual life—going to Mass and the Sacraments with my body and living more and more as far as my soul was concerned in a world where my religious creed had no place. After I had been to Trinity I dropped my religion altogether. It seemed so unrelated to reality.

"Then my father died, and my mother and I came to London, and I started to write poetry, all of it taken up with what my eyes saw of the supernatural.

"A good many English people think that every Irishman is on intimate terms with a Banshee and that he dines once a week with a Leprecaun. Banshees and Leprecauns were not in my line, but I would sit in my little study in Edith Road, and the walls would melt away so that I could get up and look down from an immeasurable height upon constellations wheeling and whirling in their regiments millions of miles below in space. Or a spiritual host would visit me, drawn up tier above tier in the vault of the world. Their rose-colored garments stirred as leaves in the wind and their faces shone with beatific joy. As I walked through London streets celestial cohorts would march by my side—not always but often. I could never enter a wood but it became alive with flame and feather; choirs bright with unutterable glory flew over my head and a music fell upon my ears to waft my soul away. I was possessed with loveliness. I breathed the divine as mortals breathe the air.

"Once, some years before these spiritual visitants had become, as they did become, my daily expected companions, at a time when their manifestations were irregular, before I knew the sweet words by which to call them to my side, I remember standing in Clondalkin, a little village a few miles outside of Dublin, and looking at the round tower. This single shaft of stone is all that marks the site of a monastery. It was built so that the monks could take their chalices and manuscripts to the top where no Dane could scale or any fire reach. It was, for the purpose it served, absolutely impregnable. The Northmen never had time for a prolonged

siege and the tower could not be taken by assault, or burnt, because it was of stone.

"In that village a paper mill makes the wretched stuff upon which our journalism is printed. Thinking of this, and wondering at the passage of time that separated the precious manuscripts of the monks from the dirty rags which have become our literature, there became visible, to the naked physical eye, a day in the tenth century. Four monks, one made fierce by his macerations, another still young and ruddy, a third a brawny fellow lately from his farm, a fourth twitching with fright, clambered up the great grey base of the tower, went, I suppose (for that I could not see) step by step on a hempen ladder to the crown of the tower and waited there for the onslaught of the Northmen, who were already coming, some of them riding on stolen horses, up the slope of the hill.

"I saw them, I tell you, Bradley, with their stupid faces and their cold blue eyes. They reached the tower. They climbed the base and laughed like children at the easiness of their task; but they got no further. The tall empty shaft shot above them and on a floor of stone the four monks knelt saying their prayers. Straw and wood were brought and flame scorched the walls, but no smoke could enter the small cell at the summit; nor could the walls be hurt by the axes which two huge Danes, helmeted with sweeping wings and bright with armor of plates of brass, swung savagely and impotently against the stone.

"It may have been a whole afternoon I watched them. I know that the sun was setting over the wooded ridge when the pirates gave up the siege and rode and marched, cursing and shouting, to the north. The cavalcade was not out of sight when I came to myself.

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The sun shone as in my vision; but in a house behind me a gramophone was playing a tune from a London Music Hall. . . .

"Now I make no explanation of these visions of earthly or celestial visitors. They were quite real to me. I saw them as clearly as I could see you were the light on. But they sapped my will by debauching my emotion and intellect. One may always bring this as a test for all spiritual experience, whether conscious or subconscious—does that spiritual experience fortify or enfeeble the will? If the psalm says *Dei gentium demonia* it does not deny the objective reality of the gods, but only points out their subjective effect. The effect of all this was that my whole moral structure fell with a crash, as the Northmen meant Clondalkin tower to fall. But in that fall I learned humility; I turned, remembering that my father had named me Michael after the archangel whose unconquerable sword could dispel the powers of darkness; and I prayed to the patron whose name I bore.

"Now *this*, Bradley, you may find it harder to believe. For one minute the leader and captain of God's glorious host stood before me, shining from helm to toe, each particle of his mail was a jewel, flashing with unbearable sunlight. I could not look at him, but he looked at me. I fell before him on the floor and cried on God; when I dared to lift my head Michael was gone. Then I knelt down by my bed and prayed for what was nearly the first time in my life—the first time certainly that I had prayed with such peace and sweetness. From that day, five years ago, to this, I have had no visions, not even of St. Michael, and I ask for no visions. But my faith has stood like a rock upon a

complete certainty. And my soul is comforted with its hunger for the face of God.

### CHAPTER III

**M**UCH as Michael had told John of his spiritual experiences, there was more that he did not tell. Concerning the incident that had been the climax of his earlier phase, he was silent—indeed, only to his confessor had he ever spoken of it. The memory he wore as a hair shirt, as secret and as painful.

Supernaturalism had been accepted by Michael for years as a luxury, nay, as an indulgence. When he spoke of the need for asceticism as a discipline for mysticism, his words were barbed with his personal anguish. He remembered how he became in his imagination and emotions nothing else than a voluptuary; that is, he had given full rein to what might be called his psychic powers, never attempting to guide them or hold them by means of his will. Consequently his will failed him at need.

The shock was salutary, and when Michael walked down the Waterloo Road late one evening five years ago the whole horror of what he had accomplished broke him, ultimately to heal him. The details of his shame, little things like a cigarette end and a picture postcard of a cinema star burnt themselves in upon his mind. His flesh shuddered at the remembrance, from whose actuality he had fled. Everything had been seen in a cold and cruel clarity. Each thrust of the whip that smote him tasted blood.

A sharp line of cleavage was drawn. His past life was at an end; that he saw as he walked with haggard furtive eyes and downcast head along the Strand. The boy in him was dead, the man not yet born. Whatever the future might hold life was changed, had become indeed fundamentally different from everything that had gone before. He understood now what it was to eat of the fruit of the tree of good and evil.

The essential strength of Michael's character, never before so violently tested, came out under circumstances which filled him with self-disgust. He would not disguise matters from himself. What was done could not be undone, but it did not therefore follow that it could not be mended. There was an end to a chapter in his life, never to be re-written; there was also a new chapter which his decision could and would shape. He scorned himself too much to pity himself. All that he felt was that he must walk with abject humility for the rest of his days.

Donovan arrived home that night very late, having walked all the way to Kensington. He was too sick at the moment for remorse. Almost savagely he told himself that that could wait. The first necessity was to act and to act, if possible, irrevocably. Four hours he paced up and down his room, deep in thought.

At last he made up his mind and at once a weight seemed lifted from it. Kneeling down before a little crucifix over his head that he had never been impious enough to remove, though he had for long ignored it, he prayed quietly. Then unhooking the cross with its figure of the Crucified, he held it before him kissing the feet of the Image of our Lord and vowed, quite calmly, fully conscious of what he was doing, and with clear resolution, to perform perpetual penance for his sin

by lifelong celibacy. The vow marked and sealed his will; and Michael, worn out with thought, content with the step he had just taken, got into bed and instantly fell asleep.

Later, when he was able to review the matter as a whole, and to note its connection with years of spiritual excitement uncontrolled by spiritual discipline, sorrow swept in and flooded his soul. That evening he went to the Brompton Oratory, arriving at a time when he would have to wait over an hour for the doors to open again for the service held each evening. No celestial comrades walked by his side, none at least whose presence was apparent, but patiently and with no abjection Michael sauntered up and down the Brompton Road.

The Service, peculiar to the Fathers of the Oratory, began a few minutes after the doors were opened, so Michael had to wait till the prayers, the sermon, the hymns and Benediction were over before he could enter the Confessional. Late as was the hour two other penitents entered the box before Michael who, when his turn came, was made dumb by his unfamiliarity with the sacrament and his great agitation. He began to stammer as much as he could recall of the *Confiteor* and was relieved by the priest interrupting him with the question, "How long was it since you last went to Confession?" Yet the interruption upset his balance and he could hardly continue. It was nearly ten years since the last time. The priest's heart warmed towards that object so rare in the confessional, a poor sinner, but he saw that few words were needed on the occasion. The hand was lifted in absolution and Michael passed out into the church.

The sacristan was going round picking up hymn-



books, anxious for the last worshipper to leave, but Michael knelt before the high altar and its Divine Presence, weeping such tears as a man only sheds once. They poured down his face and a few drops got into his mouth. They tasted like honey; for there is no sweetness comparable to complete repentance and complete forgiveness. He said the three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys which constituted his penance and went home in a frame of mind he had never known before, a solemn gaiety. Not that night but the night following St. Michael, his great unacknowledged patron, the might of whose protection is only second to that of the Queen of Heaven, stood before those mortal eyes so accustomed to immortality, and the last chain of bondage fell before a spiritual sword. The iron links left no mark, but the scar inflicted on Michael Donovan by his own sin remained, and would—of that much he was already certain—remain forever, unseen except by God and himself.

So it was that when John Bradley drew out a little volume of Michael Donovan's poems from his pocket and read one of them to his sister Marjorie, he and his hearer were quite unconscious of the fact that the particular poem which John had chosen was the last poem of Michael's first phase. Neither of them suspected or could suspect that the lyric, whose name was "Rapture," was written the night before cataclysm fell upon the poet, sweeping his past away. Nearly two years passed before Michael began to write again, in a manner not less rapturous but more mellow of the inexhaustible loveliness he had rediscovered in the faith to which he had returned.

Wholly innocent of the irony of the situation John read and Marjorie listened to Michael's verses:

"The rocks and the great seas divide!  
The stars are shaken to and fro,  
Like cherries in a gale!" so cried  
My rapt and blissful woe.

"The prisoned spirits of the hills,  
The gods that lived ere God began,  
Are loosened; and their beauty fills  
The hungry heart of man.

"They ring me round about with spears;  
Their pinions sweep above my head;  
At their command the faltering years  
Give up their ghostly dead.

"Time in a cycle backwards turns!  
The soul flies upwards out of sight!  
Is caught and ravished while it burns  
In agonized delight!"

"Then one of that sweet company,  
Whose limbs were joy, whose eyes were fire,  
Sang in excess of charity  
To comfort my desire.

And hearing him, my life became  
Oblivious of ill and good,  
Embracing and embraced of flame  
Among that multitude."

"But, John," said Marjorie, as John's voice, that had been crooning out the lines, became silent, "I have two books of Michael Donovan's poems, the last two books, and they're not like that."

The boy turned to his sister in surprise. "Where did you hear of Michael Donovan?" he asked.

A smile gathered round the corners of her mouth. "I have been reading Michael Donovan for the past two years. I know several of his poems by heart."

"Oh, he will be pleased to hear it," shouted John, greatly excited.

Marjorie laughed outright. "I daresay that I have known Michael Donovan, the poet, longer than you have, John," she said, teasing him.

"But I know the *man!*" he cried, not to be outdone in his hero-worship.

"Tell me about him. What is he like?" the girl demanded, and John, nothing loath, plunged at once into an inchoate description of his friend.

This was the first time they had been together for over a year; except for one short visit to London two springs ago and a week that John had spent in Paris during the previous summer, brother and sister had not met. Since John had picked up the Crechets and Marjorie in a hotel at Lille they had been traveling by motor, through the eastern corner of Belgium on to Cologne and the Rhine Valley. The enormous car went bounding along the road, John sitting with Monsieur Crechet on the driver's seat while inside Marjorie and Madame Crechet and the children were segregated from the men. Dust and wind and sun by day and a big meal and a soft bed in an inn every evening had prevented Marjorie from seeing John alone.

But now they had the whole afternoon together, and leaving the Crechets below in the village they set off along the wooded ridge running along the Rhine. The sun threw strong black shadows on the slope; the water of the river glittered and gleamed in the light; and here was Marjorie sitting on a fallen log and talking just as she used to do in those old days that had been undisturbed by the problems of life and religion and love.

He declared with the engaging enthusiasm which was

his most pleasing social quality, that she hadn't altered by a hair's breadth.

"Oh, yes, I have, my dear!" she retorted, "you mayn't think it but I weigh half a stone more now than I did in Dorking."

John looked at her and laughed causelessly, the best laugh in the world. "Half a stone! I don't believe it. You look as light as a feather!"

"Hardly that, John," she said. "I was always pretty plump. But listen, I don't want to talk about anything so absurd as my *avoirdu pois*. There are lots of things I want to know. Don't tell me more about Mr. Donovan just at present, or I shall go falling in love with him; and that's a dangerous thing to do before you've seen the man. Besides, for all I know, he might be married——"

"He isn't," put in the boy, with naïve earnestness; and Marjorie's silver laughter set all the birds singing in the woods.

"Well, I want to know about *you*. And in case you won't tell me until I've satisfied you—I weigh half a stone more; I eat like a German; I sleep like a mole in winter-time; I'm perfectly happy and I am, in short, as healthy and uninteresting a young woman as you'd find inside a radius of ten miles. Now you begin—only with more detail than I've supplied for my own 'Who's Who.' Remember that even if I'm an uninteresting young woman, I'm very much of a woman. You must tell me everything."

John leaned up against the log and slowly filled his pipe. This was no easy matter. Somehow he couldn't speak so naturally to his sister as he had been accustomed to speak. He struck at last half a dozen matches before he could get his pipe properly alight. Then he

began a long rambling story about Willow and Wainwright's villainies and hypocrisies, recounting unimportant and irrelevant incidents at great length, and mentioned a long week-end spent last Easter at Dorking and described the new greenhouse his aunts had had erected in the garden—everything, in fact, that Marjorie did not want to hear.

The girl was an astute diplomatist. She discerned his reluctance and, though disappointed by it, did not attempt any assault upon it. So she let his talk run into congenial channels, leading the conversation back to the subject of Donovan, thinking to gather the information she sought from an indirect source. On Donovan, John would at least speak with enthusiasm.

"How did you come to know Michael Donovan?" Marjorie asked.

John felt a twinge of conscience as he remembered the circumstances of their first meeting. "In a 'pub,'" he answered.

Again the ripple of laughter. "If only Aunt Angela could hear you say that!" she cried. "Does she know about the pubs?"

"No," John answered. "She knows I'm not a Meltonian and that's bad enough of course; but I daren't let her know that I've committed the sin against the Holy Ghost of drinking a glass of beer! But what about you, Marjorie! You actually drank a mug of lager yesterday after eating three cream cakes. That shocked even me!"

John was glad to have turned the corner so well and felt more at ease. There was nothing else likely to arise concerning Donovan that he would wish to conceal from Marjorie. After that it became easier to talk of Donovan's religion and of John's own.

"Marjorie, I've never told you before. You know, of course, that I long ago got disgusted with Meltonianism. You know how afraid we were of God as children. Well, I'm not afraid of Him any more now." He paused and struck two more abortive matches. "You were always naturally religious and you didn't question about things as I did. . . . well, though I don't claim to have finally fixed my belief, I am on the way to doing so. I'm not a Catholic yet, Marjorie, but I shall have to become one if I'm to retain my sanity."

The girl's arm stole over his shoulder and her hand went under his chin. She did not speak, but something in her manner moved John to turn his head and he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"What is the matter, Marjorie dear?" he cried.

"It's nothing. I'm quite all right. Sit down again and I'll tell you something."

John did as he was bid, tensely expectant, with a tremendous flutter in his heart. The girl then resumed. "I kept from telling you until I saw you; I dreaded having to explain but you've made it so much easier. It has become so simple now . . . I was received into the Catholic Church at Whitsuntide. That's all."

She cried very quietly and happily. Her words shook John considerably and her falling tears seemed to strike him like stones. Why, he could not imagine. He was too surprised to speak. It seemed inexplicable that that which he had not yet completely gained (though he had agonized and hungered for it) Marjorie had picked up as casually as a child might pick a daisy from a meadow.

"However did you manage it?" he asked.

"There was nothing to manage," she replied. "I couldn't help it."

"But I—— I have *suffered* in order to believe!" the boy cried, almost passionate with anger. "And I don't believe yet!"

"John, darling," Marjorie's rich voice answered, "you struggle too much. In the end one has to surrender. The soul has to give up its sword to God. My Faith was so inevitable to me that I find it difficult to understand my conversion. I like to feel that I have always been a Catholic. I must be an *anima naturaliter Catholica*. I became a Catholic as soon as I saw the Church. I can't think of myself as a convert, though I made my first communion only six weeks ago. Perhaps I'm vain. Converts usually are such impossible people. Their faith has cost them so much that they display it with the greatest vulgarity. Poor things—they'd have a much better time if they'd take more on trust."

The lad was piqued. "So you sneer at the convert in advance!" he exclaimed bitterly.

Again the arm went over his shoulder. "I'm not sneering at you dear," said the girl very gently. "I'm trying to help you. When you do become a Catholic, you'll get the Faith too thoroughly to vulgarize it."

John was still sullen, despite his sister's endearments. "Tell me," he said somewhat stiffly, "how it happened?"

"I told you before," she said, "that I'm a most uninteresting young woman. There's not a scrap of the sensations about my conversion. I simply grew into Catholicism."

John still insisted on hearing more, so Marjorie went on: "The only incident I can get hold of for you,

John, was the fact of my coming to France. Monsieur Crechet is professedly of no religion; Madame Crechet (she is the sister of mother's old school friend May Salter, you remember) is vaguely Church of England. They don't bother their heads about God from one week's end to the other. So I've been entirely free from the curse of theological argument. But when we were staying in Brittany I used to wander into the churches there. The people were so fearfully devout and so fearfully serious . . . It's the sea, I suppose," she added with apparent inconsequence.

"When we went to live in our winter quarters, I used to go over to the village church for a walk sometime in the afternoon. The people were not specially devout; in fact, I suppose that they would strike Protestants as being irreverent. It wasn't the people. Nobody I talked to had the least thing to do with it. I was conscious of the Presence and I got into the way of speaking to It, God seemed so friendly and gracious. I never had any doubts or even any questionings, I think. But one fine day I woke up and said, 'God bless my soul, I believe I'm a Catholic' . . . There, that's not a very exciting story."

The evening was beginning. So the brother and sister made off, following the river southwards, to a village three miles distant, where they were to meet the Crechets for dinner. At a turn of the Rhine which swung suddenly round between steep, thickly wooded banks, they came to a place where the highlands fell away into rich fields on either side, and where the river swirled around a small island.

"This must be Grenzhaus!" cried Marjorie. "There's the convent and two nuns working in the garden. I'll tell you the story. We can sit down here for a quarter



of an hour. It's a good story—and you deserve to hear something romantic after my dull spiritual experiences; listen.

“There was once a young knight living in Cologne or near it who dearly loved a beautiful lady. But dearly as he loved her she loved him as dearly. They were to have been married and would have been if a crusade had not begun. In his fervor, the knight felt that he would be unworthy of his God and of his lady if he did not take the cross and charge against the infidel in the Holy Land. So he went.

“Three years passed and the Crusade failed. The crusaders returned home, but the knight of Cologne did not return. It was said that he had fallen in battle. The beautiful lady did not believe this and waited for another year. But still her lover did not return. Because she could never marry any other man, and because she wanted to be free to pray for her lover's soul, she decided to enter the convent of Grenzhaus.

“The day came when she should be given the habit and (as the custom was in the thirteenth century) make her vows at the same time. Wearing the rich brocade she should have worn at her marriage to the lost knight, she moved up the aisle into the sanctuary and knelt at the altar. There the bishop cut off her hair and it fell lock by lock, shining like gold. She was given her gray dress, a veil and a ring. Behind a pillar, watching with indescribable emotion, was the knight, who had just returned after having escaped from captivity.

“He made no sound and gave no sign. But on the bank of the river, perhaps at the spot at which we are sitting, he built himself a little hut and there he lived

as a hermit. Sometimes he would see his lady walk in the garden, or work as these nuns are working now. She never saw him.

"Years passed, and the knight grew old and white with his vigils. The abbess heard of his sanctity and visited him. To her he spoke in words that were almost lyrical of the love of God. To his own soul he spoke those words equally of his Maker and his mistress. He was a mighty lover and turned his earthly passion heavenwards. But his earthly passion was not lessened by being purified. At last the hermit yielded to the persuasions of the Abbess and came, much against his will, to speak of the love of God to the nuns in their garden. His beard was white and his eye hollow; these, he thought, would prevent him from being recognized. But something in his tone, some phrase now devoted to God, once offered to herself, revealed him to the nun who was to have been his bride. With a cry of joy she ran towards him, and reached him just in time to catch him before he fell. In her arms he expired; and on his tomb, which is in that cloister garden, are carved his last words *Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine, in pace.*"

Marjorie ended and John felt impelled to silence. They spoke but little on the remaining half of their journey, except in voices hushed to a whisper. Both the recounter and the hearer of the story were moved by it.

In John's mind, woven and mingled with the sweet pain of the legend, was a feeling of disquiet. For some reason, which he was unable to fathom, the story of these frustrated lovers seemed applicable to himself. He had heard it by accident and yet it struck him as part of a design. It affected his mood and induced an-

other. Why had Marjorie (who had heard of Elsie by letter) not mentioned her? Why had *he* not mentioned her? Questions, curious, without a reason or an answer, insistent, cruel, racked him. He cursed himself for a morbid fool and then was angry with himself for his curses. In this unenviable spirit he reached the friendly lights of the inn that was their destination.

#### CHAPTER IV

**M**ARJORIE came to England at the end of September, and announced her intention of staying a month. How she stage-managed the affair so as to stay with Elsie, in view of the fact that Mr. Martindale was still ignorant of his daughter's engagement, is not known. But as Marjorie really came to London especially to see what kind of a girl Elsie was (though her announced reasons for the visit were that she wanted to do some shopping and was anxious to visit her aunts), she deserved congratulation for her skillful diplomacy.

Elsie dreaded having Marjorie in her father's house, divining her purpose in coming; but she determined to do her best to placate her lover's sister. She was shrewd enough to perceive the advantage that might arise from a friendship with Marjorie, and, like all her sex, practiced upon her guest a diplomacy as delicate as Marjorie's own.

Mr. Martindale was snob enough to be proud of having an unmistakable lady staying with his daughter upon equal terms; but after he had seen the girl nobler

sentiments drew him to admire her. The complete absence, indeed the apparent unconsciousness of her social superiority to himself, moved him to enthusiasm quite as much as did her gracious dignity.

Because Mr. Martindale spoke so often and eulogistically of her friend, Elsie became bored with her father's incessant encomiums. That, added to the irritation she felt at what she unjustly looked upon as Marjorie's patronage, kindled a sullen rage within her. She did not dare to vent it; in fact, she met Marjorie's kindly advances with responses as cordial as her hypocrisy could simulate, but she could not conceal from those candid feminine eyes the cold malignity which quite escaped a duller masculinity.

Marjorie would not speak to John of what she believed to be Elsie's true character. She knew that it could do no good and might even do harm, by precipitating what she feared. John would be certain to put it down to the jealousy which men believe to be in every woman (though jealousy, as the genius of Shakespeare discovered, exists more strongly and frequently in the male than in the female); a mere word in John's present condition could quite easily impel him to a marriage that might yet, she hoped, be averted by time or chance.

She confided her fears to Donovan during a Saturday afternoon ramble in Richmond Park. The lovers, with the sublime selfishness of lovers, had detached themselves from their companions. They were disappearing round the curving fence that enclosed a copse, where the tall trees were slowly taking on rich colors in the autumn sun, when Marjorie spoke. There was a flutter of pink and white, a wave of the hand from John and they had gone from sight.

Naturally and with tacit consent Michael and Marjorie had adopted the use of each other's Christian names. Something deeper than their connection with John was the origin of so instant a sympathy between them. Marjorie could not feel like this towards Cregan, though he was "Maurice" to her. Still less could she feel like it towards House, too much of a "man's man" even for Marjorie. With Michael, however, she was at ease, so much at ease that she was unaware of its degree.

"Michael," she said, "I don't like this engagement."

"Why not?" he asked.

"You'll think me cattish if I tell you," she answered.

"By which you mean that you don't like Elsie?"

"Yes."

"That's a good enough reason, I suppose, Marjorie. I don't like Elsie very much myself. But all the same the marriage might turn out very well, even if you and I are too short-sighted to see the superlative virtues of Mrs. Bradley."

"I'm not deceived, Michael, even if you do laugh at me. I wouldn't interfere for the world, because I cannot even if I had the right. But I have the sense of impending disaster."

"I shouldn't worry about it," Michael answered. "These things are all in the Hands of God."

"The trouble is, Michael, that the willful soul takes them out of God's Hands and makes a mess of the matter. John has become so headstrong."

They were silent, walking on towards the line of lakes. Michael took up his parable again. "Yes, I know, Marjorie," he said, "but the only way of teaching some people is to let them muck things up for

themselves. It was the way I learned. I am afraid that it is the way John will have to learn. The proud have to be broken; nothing is so merciful as the wrath of God."

Marjorie sighed. "It is a terrible business to see the poor dear boy making a hash of his life."

Michael turned to her, a twinkle in his eye. "But is he making a hash of his life?"

"He will. You see, Elsie doesn't love John. At least she doesn't love John enough to marry him. She will marry him and it will be a ghastly tragedy."

Michael grew grave. "Well, I know nothing about her. John is very much in love."

"Yes," Marjorie answered quickly. "That's the worst feature of the case. He will expect a lot and he will get nothing. She will despair because she will be unable to give him what he asks. If he would be content with less, his disappointment and disillusionment would be less."

Michael stood still, thinking hard. Then he spoke. "Marjorie, powers of divination and the like I renounced long ago. You shouldn't worry yourself about the future. Looking at the past and the present I say that, whatever may be the happiness of John's heart if he marries Elsie, he has decidedly improved since he fell in love. Elsie may or may not be worthy of his love but until John finds it out he can't be hurt much. Let him keep his ideals as long as possible. . . . I know more about your brother's recent mental development than even you do. If he comes a crash over his marriage it will be a noble crash, one that can bring him no discredit. Defeat never spoils a man, but treason spoils him. Elsie, I think, saved him from

treason. You think that his attraction towards the Catholic Church is due to my influence. Elsie is unaware of it, but she is the influence."

"But, my dear Michael," cried Marjorie. "The girl hasn't a scrap of religion in her! That fact is as appalling as her feeble capacity for affection!"

"Marjorie," said Michael, "would you be offended if I said that women are always more severe upon women than men are? I think you're unjust. There must be more in Elsie than you imagine."

"We women are realists, Michael. Men idealize women; women never idealize. You are shocked. There's no need to be. I'm not running down my sex. I thank God every day that I'm a woman."

"I thank God for——" then Michael stopped suddenly.

"For what?" insisted Marjorie.

There was no help for it. "That you're a woman."

Marjorie laughed. "You know, Michael, the women who are disgusted with being women become feminists. It's the most dastardly insult that they can pay themselves and their Creator. Because I am a woman, I exercise myself in my womanly virtue of practicality. You are exercising your manly prerogative of generalization. You admire idealism so much that you will not look at a concrete fact. There's John, he does it too. The poor boy is a mystic. He is splendidly and hopelessly in love; with what?"

"With Elsie, what else?" said Michael.

"With love," Marjorie corrected emphatically.

"Marjorie," the man asked, "do you mean to say that a man cannot be in love with a woman?"

"There you are again, Michael! The irrepressible philosopher. I never said that. Men no doubt are in

love with the woman when they find a woman they ought to love. But they live on ideas; women on facts. Women having discovered that marriage was a social necessity, men had to discover a philosophical theory to make it tolerable to themselves."

"You forget the Faith, Marjorie. Marriage is a sacrament."

"In other words, a fact plus an idea."

"More than that, I think, Marjorie—a fact and an idea in hypostatic union—the word made flesh."

It was as much as Michael could do to keep his own emotions under control. All the time that Marjorie was discussing John and while he was speaking in reply, another strong intellectual current was running through his mind. Even Marjorie had not been quite herself; once or twice her words had attempted a facile cleverness; once or twice her spirit had nearly touched cynicism. Her thoughts had been troubled, disturbed with a deeper and more intimate personal question than the love affair of her brother. Yet she preserved outward calm, the quiet assurance of perfect self-control. Inwardly she was no longer at ease with Michael. A thin impalpable curtain had fallen between them.

As they came up to John and Elsie who were sitting among the great trees by the lake, Marjorie wondered for a moment if she had been wrong in her judgment on Elsie. The girl looked so fresh and simple in her pink and white dress, and John was obviously enjoying himself. He seemed to fill out with each succeeding month, and the dark haggard eyes of a year ago were now bright and merry. His pallor had succeeded to as high a degree of color as one can reasonably expect in a city. Best of all, his partly shy, partly self-assertive manner had disappeared.



"What is the joke, John?" Marjorie asked as she came up. "Make him tell me, Elsie."

John was quite ready to re-tell the story without Elsie's persuasion. "It was about old Wainwright. Somebody rang him up during the morning and he thought it was a lady who had written to him about a house. She was a Meltonian and he likes to impress Meltonians with his piety. It's such a fine commercial asset. So when she asked, 'Who's that speaking?' old Wainwright put on his choicest sanctimonious tone and answered, 'A sinner saved by Grace.' 'Grace who?' the other voice asked (I had the receiver off downstairs and so heard all this). Then Wainwright saw that he had made a mistake and in a very different tone asked who was speaking. The girl said, 'I'm speaking for Brown & Matthews. I was told to tell you, sir, that you can't have delivery to-day. Two of our car men are ill!' You should have seen old Wainwright. He doesn't swear, you know—not in words—but his look of diabolic venom when I went up to his room a few minutes afterwards! The old lady who was going to buy the house came in just then. In a moment he had become sugar and spice and all things nice—well, no, not *spice*; shall we say butter?"

Michael and Marjorie sat down beside the lovers, who were evidently very well pleased with themselves, for they did not appear to resent the intrusion. Again Marjorie doubted her severe judgment. Michael's opinion seemed to be the correct one. John had certainly improved greatly. He had, it is true, the objectionable habits of a lover, being unable to endure any society for long except that of his beloved, but when he was separated from her he became normal and sane again. Marjorie was sensible enough to admit

that nobody could be blamed for such a thing. The most unselfish people in the world acquired that particular form of selfishness when they were in love—but it passed in due course. Elsie might be suffering from the same malady in another form. When it had worked itself out she also would become a decent human being. That was the most charitable point of view. The girl was by no means lacking in intelligence. Good sense would be acquired in marriage, perhaps even the warmth of affection in which she now appeared to be deficient.

Michael was too generous to take a private triumph at what he saw in Marjorie's face. He was glad to know that the young couple were happy, and proud to see the pleasure such happiness brought to Marjorie, the prophet of their woe. But the pride only added a new pang to his own misery. The more gracious Marjorie became, the greater was Michael's torture. He had not even the comfort of admitting to his own soul the cause of that torture. He could not admit the fact to Marjorie—consequently he would not nurse it in his own breast.

John told another story emanating from Willow & Wainwright's office. This story, however, did not illustrate Meltonian guile, or any other matter more momentous than the crude opinionativeness and sympathy of Mr. Holden. In John's telling the tale was softened down, lest Marjorie should blush at hearing her praise; but the joke against her was allowed to remain.

Mr. Holden, it appeared, had heard of Marjorie's conversion and hastened in his kindness to console the brother. He met John out that morning; so cheerfully accosting him with, "Come and lubricate your tonsils

at the lacteal and rubicund quadruped" (words which interpreted meant, "Will you come into the Red Cow for a drink?"), gave him beer, under the mellowing influence of which John was, so Mr. Holden considered, ripe for comfort.

"Oh, that's all right, my boy," said Mr. Holden, pulling out a huge pipe and filling it in a manner which was supposed to be emblematical of a sturdy Protestantism. "That's all right. Don't you worry about it. Women *will* do these things you know—but they always come back."

"Do they really?" said John.

"Lord yes! I've known it scores of times." This wasn't strictly true. Mr. Holden had known of five cases of conversion to Rome—three of them were women—and one woman had returned because a priest had tried to hurry her in the Confessional in a busy season. Still, after that, he considered it was only a matter of time with the other four.

"Oh, but you don't know Marjorie. She's the very essence of sincerity—as straight as a die."

"I've no doubt but that she's a splendid girl, Bradley; but you know women like a fuss. They are attracted by the color and the singing—the pomp and the ritual and the gorgeous vestments—and all that. Why when I was at Amiens Cathedral at the Requiem Mass I almost felt that I would like to be a Catholic myself. It's an artistic religion, John. But indulgences were too much for me. . . . I wouldn't say a disrespectful word against your sister's religion, my boy; I wouldn't do it for worlds." Here he sank his voice to a confidential whisper. "But isn't it a lot of rot?"

In the laughter of Michael and Marjorie John joined, just as if he were himself a Catholic, making a family joke. From the humor of their joke Elsie was excluded. A shadow of displeasure crossed her face. Donovan noticed it and felt sorry for the girl. She was so evidently "out of it." But when Elsie took the earliest (and a very speedy) opportunity of going off with John, Michael's sympathy was transferred to Marjorie.

"She won't let him become a Catholic," was her first remark as soon as the couple were out of earshot.

"I've had a good opportunity of studying your brother," Michael returned. "He's made of much harder stuff than you suspect."

Marjorie made no answer until several minutes had elapsed. "Do you think I'm spiteful, Michael? I'm sure you do think it. But I love that boy, and he has got to suffer. If I knew how to help him!"

Donovan answered very quietly in a tone where authority and tenderness mingled. "Marjorie, you can do nothing. I love John—as much as I'd love a brother, if I had one. He is destined to suffer, and it will be the making of him. Our lives, as I said a little while ago, are in God's hands. Let us leave them there."

They got up to follow John and Elsie at a distance. It was as much as Donovan could do to practice his own principle at that moment. His life, in a sense, unknown to the woman at his side, was held in God's hands. The whole force of his strong faith was needed to believe that those hands held him with an infinite kindness. For an instant they seemed to be holding him like the cruel hands of a gaoler. He was a bound man.

When he told the priest in the Brompton Oratory of his vow, he received more of a scolding for having taken the vow than he received for committing the sin. The Oratorian was shocked and questioned him sharply. "Did you mean it?"

Donovan had answered quite simply and sincerely that he did.

"Well then it was exceedingly foolish of you! Occasionally people take such a vow, but only in special cases and with the approval of their confessor. I'm afraid that the time will come when you'll regret it."

Michael again had answered that he was prepared to take all consequences; that he offered it as a reparation.

Again the priest questioned him. "Was it a vow of perpetual chastity or of perpetual celibacy?"

"I drew no fine distinction, father," the penitent had replied. "I meant that I would never sin in such a way again and that I would never marry under any circumstances."

The priest washed his hands of the matter. "You've tied a stone round your neck. God give you sufficient grace to bear it."

All the grace that the priest had wished him Michael Donovan needed in the hour with Marjorie. His clear mind told him that his old vow was utterly valueless even in its application to the past five years if he proved disloyal to it now. He never before had wished to be free from it; surely he was not going to permit himself the weakness of wishing for freedom the moment his bondage hurt him. In taking the vow upon himself, he did so well aware of the nature of his decision; but the yoke had hitherto lain so lightly upon his

shoulders that he could hardly be said to be conscious of it. The immunity of the past was paid for in the agony of the present.

And yet, and yet, Michael had taken it not realizing what it would come to mean. He could not have conceived the terrific force of the appeal Marjorie made to him. He had never been in love before, and now first love seized and shook him with a strength unexperienced by those to whom it has come before the physical, mental and spiritual maturity to which Michael had attained. The sea seemed sweeping and shouting against the dykes of the world. At any moment the dykes might break. They seemed so frail an obstacle to oppose to that irresistible surge.

His iron will might have failed before the onslaught had not Michael lifted his eye very cautiously to look at Marjorie. It was dangerous to look, for if she turned he felt that he must capitulate. But her eyes were fixed upon the ground, Love lifted no beckoning finger. From the sight of that averted head Michael drew a strength greater than that in his tortured and faltering will.

Humility came to Michael's rescue and a voice spoke, perhaps the same voice as that which spoke over Genesareth, saying to the tossing waves of his soul "Be still." Immediately there was a great calm. The horror of his fall burst in upon his memory: He could not think of the details of the loathed incident—that would seem like a profanation before that serene beautiful face. But the fact struck him like a whip, bringing a dog to heel. More than ever was abject humility needed now. It was not only treason but sacrilege to think, however hopelessly, of what must be forever impossible,

Then the sea surged back again, wedded to humility. To the lover his own unworthiness is the sharpest spur to desire. The same spirit that told him that he could not deserve what he desired, inspired him with a passion pure enough to seek it. The lover's lowliness lifted him up to the stars. His very abjection was the cause of his audacity.

Michael's hands trembled. He gritted his teeth furiously to hold himself in. It seemed as if the whole earth was wheeling round his unsteady feet. Another moment and it would be all over.

Just then Marjorie, unaware of the terrific struggle going on beside her, but awaking out of her reverie to the knowledge that strange happenings were taking place, looked at Michael who had gone ashy pale. As she turned the man groaned heavily and leaned upon his stick as if in bitter pain.

"What is it, Michael? What's the matter? You're ill!" the girl cried, alarmed by the wild aspect upon him.

Donovan drew himself up straight, slowly and with difficulty as if knotted with ague. Every muscle in his face seemed to be twitching with a distinct action peculiar to itself. Then he spoke hoarsely, "It's nothing."

"What is it Michael? Tell me. I've never seen you like this."

The man made a supreme effort. He wanted to kiss the girl's feet. He wanted to take her in his arms and cover her lips with kisses. But he recovered his self-control. "It's nothing, Marjorie. There, I'm all right now. . . . Don't you think we'd better catch up with the others. It must be time to be going back."

## CHAPTER V

ELSIE'S chill heart never became warmer than on those fairly frequent occasions when she tried to repulse John. She knew herself, she knew her own unaffectionate disposition, above all she knew that she did not love John in the way that he had a right to expect. Time and time again the girl tried her utmost to explain the situation. Her efforts were unavailing. John took her by storm each time, her subtlety was no match for his strength.

Regularly she resisted, moved by that pity which was her nearest approach to love, crying out against his folly; regularly she yielded, carried away by her lover's insistency.

"It's for your sake! It's for your sake!" she would moan, while surrendering. "If we marry it will be a calamity. I feel as if I have signed your death warrant."

"Why what rubbish!" he would exclaim. "So far from being my death warrant, it will be my pardon from the sentence of death."

Her attempts to break the engagement were prompted by good feeling towards this boy. Had he loved her less, she would not have felt under the obligation of offering him a love approximately equal to the great measure he offered her. But as it was, she knew that she could never satisfy him, and, indeed, because of the magnitude of his demands would not have the courage to proffer the little store which more moderate demands might obtain.

Socially John was a catch. He was not rich, but he



belonged to the professional middle class—and so was several degrees above the daughter of a Builder's foreman. To do Elsie justice it is necessary to say that this fact did not have any weight with her reluctant acceptance of John; on the contrary the weight was cast into the other side of the scale, and was an additional reason against marrying him.

So far Elsie was generous. She pitied John for wishing to marry her; she pitied him still more when she looked into the future; but most of all she pitied his pathetic distress whenever she tried to reason with him. He was ardently, cruelly in love—and Elsie did not possess sufficient strength of character to act upon her own good sense.

The girl was also misled by her moods. John's company was pleasant to her. Elsie liked him and managed to obtain a certain amount of superficial happiness in her courtship. Consequently she avoided introspection as far as possible, and suppressed a dubiety that was overwhelmed by John's protestations whenever she expressed it.

For the past few weeks her relations with John had been easy; so much so that she had begun to wonder if, after all, she had not been wrong in her mistrust. He had been pressing her hard for marriage. He had attained his majority and the control of the small legacy of just under two hundred and fifty pounds left him by his father. After he had paid a few debts—Elsie's engagement ring had been bought out of borrowed money—he had about a hundred and seventy pounds left. This was a sufficient justification for pressing Elsie to marry him.

She had consented, her doubts lulled into slumber; and her gaiety in Richmond Park the previous Satur-

day, like John's, had sprung out of their arrangements for the wedding. They decided that it should take place at a Registry Office in three weeks' time; that no one should be told about it; and that they would go immediately afterwards to America, the home of millionaires and failures, as John's prospects in England were not sufficiently rosy for a matrimonial adventure. The stipulation for secrecy was Elsie's. Afterwards she compromised to the extent of agreeing to let Marjorie, Michael and Maurice know at the last minute. John accepted the principle of clandestinity on the ground that as he wished it to apply to his aunts, Elsie had a right to apply it to her father, but he insisted upon Marjorie being told.

"But Marjorie doesn't like me!" cried Elsie.

"Nonsense, Elsie darling! You are wide of the mark there. If Marjorie disliked you, she would have told me so. That's the sort she is."

Elsie was not convinced, but she conceded the point. Marjorie should be invited to the wedding, but she must be kept in ignorance until matters were too far advanced for her to interfere with them.

The die was cast. That morning John had seen the registrar. Three weeks later he and Elsie would be married. The mere fact of decision had changed both John's state of triumph and Elsie's state of doubt into a state of peace. Nothing mattered now.

It was on a loud gray night that John walked with Elsie over Hampstead Heath along the path which, because they had traveled it so often, they called their path to that seat upon a little knoll with trees which they called "their seat." The year was hastening to its close and the impatient hands of the wind shook the

trees and whirled the leaves down in crowds as if dissatisfied with the slow courses of the seasons. Gorgeous in browns and reds and golds they fluttered down, falling upon the coats of the two lovers as they sat very close together upon the seat a thoughtful corporation had provided for the consolation of their hearts. In these first days of October the year had put on its most splendid apparel in a brave poetry of final joy\*before the winter would strip it naked. The high cruel wind was plucking their beauty from the trees with ruthless fingers, as if to show how poor were the rags in which they were arrayed. The branches were tossed to and fro with a sound as the gentle surge of the sea, the steady and persistent wash of great waters. Not content with despoiling the branches the wind shook out all the lovely glow of Elsie's hair, at which she was annoyed and John pleased. She could not do it up again successfully in such weather he told her. Much better leave it wild and hide it inside her coat when she was ready to go home. Let it blow all about his face until then. He kissed her lips and was silent. The weather accorded with his thoughts.

Elsie was very humble that night and leaned her soft birdlike body against him, till he knew that the fleet woodland creature was tame for an hour. It was only at rare intervals that Elsie became quiet and yielding like this. How often she changed, being fierce and fickle in turns, now ice, now fire, shy and illusive, meek and tremulous, until his love for the constantly changing shadows of her face was mingled with despair of keeping pace with her fugitive moods. But the bird had come back to its nest to-night and John was thankful, daring not to speak for sheer happiness.

A thin rain began to fall, blown by the wind into

their faces. They arose, John still holding her fast by the waist, and made for the main road. There was no need to go in yet and John knew where they could find a shelter upon the Heath. Five minutes walking brought them to the garden of an inn. "Oh, Jack, darling, you're not going to take me in there are you?" she cried.

"Not into the house, dear heart, but there are little arbors in the garden and no one else is likely to be there."

It was very dark now, but groping along a winding path they came out upon the edge of the hill at the back of the inn; and found there five or six little summerhouses, built of thatch and twisted sticks, very snug and pretty, where safe and dry they could look over the rolling hollows toward the lights of Cricklewood. "Jack, this is a lovely place!" exclaimed Elsie as happy as a child. "Do tell me what it is called." As John remembered its name he was startled at the memory of something else. He answered, "I believe it's called 'The House that Jack built.'"

"Oh, but what a strange name and what a delightful one, Jack darling. How lucky! Our house. 'The House that Jack built!'" For answer he drew her head down to him and kissed her lips, then her cheek and found it wet. A thrill ran through him at the thought of that other stormy night when he found this wild thing lost upon the Heath.

He said now, "Do you remember the first time I kissed you, sweetheart? When I gave you my rain-coat? Your face was quite wet then and is wet now, so that it all comes back to me. . . . There are no kisses like them, Elsie," and he kissed her cheek again, "when we are married, I shall always try to surprise

you when you are washing and catch the old thrill of that kiss." Elsie blushed very much and was thankful of the dusk which hid her face.

"You are a silly boy; soap and water won't taste nice—not like the clean rain, anyhow!" John thought it would—upon *her* face, and said so, upon which Elsie laughed delightedly and nestled deep down upon his breast.

They sat there in silence for a long time, perhaps nearly an hour, without stirring, and when the rain ceased at last, John gently kissed her. She did not move. "Elsie!" he said very softly, but no answer came and he knew she was asleep. His limbs were getting very stiff and cramped; let them petrify if they like, he said to himself—he was not going to lose any of the delicious comfort of holding Elsie asleep in his arms. There they sat, John hearing the slow croon of her breathing and feeling her body gently rise and fall in rhythmic regularity against his own, until she opened her eyes and, reaching up to John's neck, drew his face down to hers with the simple confidence of a good child. It was the happiest moment of his life.

When John reached his lodgings that night, he found on the table in his sitting room a brief note from Donovan. It read:

*"Friday.*

198 EDITH ROAD,  
WEST KENSINGTON.

DEAR JOHN,

"Will you come and bring Elsie and Marjorie to dinner here to-morrow? I absolutely decline to take 'No' for an answer. Forgive the short notice—and my sending you a command instead of an invitation. House is out of town

so I can't get him. But I've sent a note similar to this to Maurice Cregan. I'll meet you at the Marble Arch at six sharp.

"Yours peremptorily,  
"M. D."

There was no avoiding such an invitation. Consequently Marjorie and Elsie, with John as escort, met Michael at the time and place appointed, and walked across the Park to the Tube Station at Hyde Park Corner, where they took the train to Earl's Court.

A strange mad mood had fallen upon Michael, a kind of fierce gaiety: never had his conversation been more brilliant or reckless. As they turned a corner to the west of the Earl's Court Road, the company came upon a poor blind old man standing on the curb, who was scraping slowly and dolefully upon a violin. Michael stopped and watched the musician a moment. Then he wheeled round on John saying, "Good Lord, I wish I could play."

An idea seemed to strike Michael, for suddenly stepping up to the man, he took his instrument away from him and placed it in John's hands. "Here! you do it, Bradley."

"But my dear fellow!" John protested.

"Nonsense! You can do it. Go on."

John felt very uncomfortable but it was impossible for him to disobey the imperious Michael, so tuning the instrument he began to play. He went through Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" and found that the violin would yield music to his touch. But when upon ending he saw that a crowd had begun to gather he was for flight. Michael would not suffer this. "Go on," he insisted. So John played a wild Bohemian theme full

of the voices of children sobbing in the dark, the most terrible of all things, the unhappiness of the young. His pleasure had conquered his shyness and when Michael said "Now one more—something they know," John again drew the bow across the strings and the clear, bird-like notes of the Intermezzo from the *Cavalleria Rusticana* flew into the air.

When the last tender note had died away, Michael went round with his hat in his hand, among the large crowd which was standing about. He returned with a collection ten times as large as any that the blind beggar had ever obtained before, silver gleaming here and there through the bronze. They emptied the money into the old man's pockets and having handed his violin back to him made off, feeling immensely pleased with themselves.

"John," said Michael, "I wish I could play."

"Why?"

"Because the Franciscans say that a monk should take nothing about with him except his lyre."

The two girls walking a few yards behind did not hear Michael's remark or see the surprise with which John stared at his friend. "Don't talk in enigmas," he said. "What do you mean?"

Michael in reply spoke very slowly and distinctly. "I mean that this is my last Saturday in London. I've got you all here to say good-by to you all. On Monday morning I am going down to a little Sussex village—to be a monk."

John was staggered. This affected him in a more intimate fashion than could the loss of his friend. Something struck his heart a heavy blow, and a bell responded in the distance. After a pause he asked, "How long have you been thinking of doing this?"

That question, made innocently, went a little too near home for Michael to reply in detail. But he waved it off with "Oh, not long. . . . I say, John," Donovan cried, catching sight of his companion's gloom, "cheer up, and help me through with it! I've got to break the news to the others."

"Have you told Marjorie?"

Donovan became aware of another awkward question. He winced under it. "I haven't told anyone yet. I brought you together to save my breath. I don't want to keep on repeating it over and over again."

John walked on in silence. Then, "I wonder what Marjorie will say."

That remark it was safest to ignore. It would soon be discovered what she would think of the news.

When she heard it, Marjorie made no sound; but her eyes shone like stars. Donovan, despite the strict rein by which he held himself in, hadn't the courage to look at her. Elsie watching her like a cat, noticed the fact and drew her own (largely correct) inferences between that and Michael's state of mental tension. But his tension came only from the necessity under which he lay of explaining his action, not from the action itself. There were certain lengths to which he could not go—looking at Marjorie during the announcement for example—but upon the whole he exhibited masterly self-control. He had fortified his will so far, but he knew that it could not hold out indefinitely. Consequently he decided to prove his courage in the only way possible—by flight, by spurs. Proximity to Marjorie was more than his resolution could endure. He meant to keep his resolution and adopted the best means for doing so, that of going away.

The cut was clean and straight. The previous Mon-



day his mind was made up. He took a train down to Arundel, walked over to the Franciscan Monastery at Slindon, where he had several times stayed for short visits; applied for admission into the Order and was accepted. He did not tell the Superior of his vow or of his temptation. He meant to adopt the religious life on its own merits without reference to complicating circumstances.

Michael's friends took his announcement in stupefied silence. In so far as anyone spoke it was to express his sympathy—save in the case of Maurice Cregan. He gave an emphatic condemnation to monasticism in general and to Michael in particular, saying, "If you will pardon what may seem to be rudeness but is really friendship, Donovan, your going into a monastery is absolute waste. At the worst it is madness; at the best fanaticism. How can you, a poet, shut yourself away from the world and all those emotions and experiences which are the main business of a poet, passes my comprehension. It is moral suicide."

Michael stood up at the dining table, everything else lost for the moment except his delight in debate. "You are quite correct, Cregan, but not quite adequate in your summary of the case. I go to spend that I may gain. But you only see the spending; I see the spending *and* the gain. St. Gregory, I think it was, once said, 'It is a smaller thing to renounce what one has than what one is.' I renounce the poet. But I renounce poetry for the sake of poetry. I shall write no more verses but I shall live poetry—a great loss and a greater gain!"

John found time after dinner to speak to Michael alone for a few minutes. Both of the men were greatly moved. Bradley told Donovan of his approaching

marriage, apologizing for not telling him before. "I haven't even told Marjorie yet," he added.

"Well, God bless you, John," said Michael. "May you and Elsie be very happy." It brought back that afternoon in Richmond Park and almost forced out of him a confidence he did not wish to bestow on anyone. He checked himself and repeated, "God bless you."

"I say, Michael, I'll promise you something. I'll become a Catholic."

"Blasphemer!" Donovan cried in mock deprecation. "You mustn't promise things like that!" . . . and he crossed the room to his mother who had called him.

Michael walked to the top of the road with his guests, to the point at which they could catch their bus, and managed, by dropping behind with Marjorie, to have the only private words with her afforded during the evening.

He began to talk about poetry and himself, two subjects it was not his custom to link together. They served a purpose now, as they had served a purpose all through dinner, that of providing a red herring to draw pursuers off the track.

"Marjorie," said Michael, "did you ever read Aubrey Beardsley's letters? No? Well, they are rather disappointing, rather trivial. In one of them, however, he says that the Christian must sacrifice his art for the love of God just as Magdalene must sacrifice her beauty."

"Is it true?" asked the girl quietly.

"Not universally—in particular instances. Perhaps it is in this instance."

Silence fell between them. Then Marjorie spoke again. "You are doing a fine thing, Michael—and a very difficult one."

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Donovan spoke with hesitation. "Yes, a difficult one. You won't forget to pray for me?"

She promised with her eyes, into which Donovan at last found strength to look, and the bus rumbled up.

The four new fares took their seats and the conductor rang the bell. The last they saw of Michael was the figure of a tall, handsome young man standing in the bright circle cast by the lamp-post. He looked very debonair, waving his hat as the bus shot off down the road. His soul was racked with unutterable torments.

### **PART III**



## CHAPTER I

**H**ARDLY any of the leaves had fallen, for no wind or rain had come during the past month, but the steady hot sun had burned them to richer autumnal tints than are usually seen. As the failing sunset lit them fitfully they gleamed like burnished brass; where the rays did not pierce they were delicate gold. The air was warm, yet it contained a chilly whisper that came through the open window at which Marjorie sat. Warmed by it she had lighted a wood fire in the grate by the further wall and tongues of flame sent cheerful flickers of light along the polished wood floor of the nursery. The fire and the air from outside set off one another, in a way that the approaching winter would not permit.

Madame Crechet was accustomed to indulge her English peculiarities. She not only had afternoon tea every day, but tea on the lawn when it was fine enough. It was now early October. Tea was still taken on the lawn, and the cups, not yet cleared from the wicker table, shone like silver. Sufficient light remained by which Marjorie could see the Crechets sitting in canvas chairs; sufficient darkness had arrived to make the glow of Madame Crechet's cigarette-end apparent.

Where the last arrows of the sunset alighted Marjorie's hair gleamed like the pale gold of the woods covering the hills; now and then the fire leaping up would flood Marjorie with warmer color. She seemed part of the Autumn and entered in sympathy into its

mood. John often said that she suggested Spring time. Other people thought as much without being privileged to give expression to their thoughts.

She had not grown older, or only a year older, since she waved farewell to John and Elsie a year ago from the wharf at Southampton. Spring would come again, and she would be young like the Spring. But she could never be more beautiful than she was in this hour, as she sat at the open window, looking at the fading sky.

Time had brought a good deal of sorrow during the past year and also one great joy. Both sorrow and joy had combined in a sweet confederacy that had left her marked with a grave serenity. She would not have said that she included her hopeless love for Michael as part of her sorrow, even had she been strictly cross-examined under oath concerning a secret that she had padlocked away from the world, because her pain was of that fine and fortunate quality which contains its own consolation. Moreover, she accepted her loss of love as a man accepts the fact of the loss of a limb, and took it for granted, adjusting her life upon a new permanent basis. No; her sorrow lay in John; her joy also lay in him.

At first her brother's letters from New York had been vaguely disquieting, not so much from the news they gave as from the news that Marjorie felt certain they withheld. It was not much to go upon, and that little had been indefinite—so that she had often tried to resist her apprehensions, telling herself that she, like all women, was inclined to pessimism, and reminding herself that had she not prophesied a tragic result for the marriage she would probably not have read calamity between the lines of John's letters. But her apprehensions regularly returned, stronger than ever; and

at last she heard enough to justify the worst she had ever imagined—though the tale of pitiful disaster was followed by news which was the source of her compensating joy.

She had been reading for the hundredth time those pages, written in her brother's clear minute nervous script. They were all arranged in chronological order, and from the first letter, the one written on the journey across the Atlantic, to the last, now a month old, written from Philadelphia, they provided food for anxiety. And yet many were on the surface untroubled. Why should she suspect more than they told?

"Yesterday evening I obtained an unexpected revelation of sympathy. The stokers off duty made themselves into a band, and gave an impromptu performance upon the lower deck. The entire ship's company, welcoming any change from monotony, crowded up, leaving the rest of the ship deserted.

"The sun was sinking, a blood-red orange, behind the horizon of the sea. The sky was a faint green, lined at its edge with golden flame, and the sea shimmered opalesque in blue and agate as the sun sank slowly into the waters. I stood spellbound at the sacramental beauty of the scene until, seeing a young girl standing near, also lost in the contemplation, I uttered some ecstatic words in praise of what was before our eyes. She replied with enthusiasm in Russian, and I became lyrical in English. For ten minutes we uttered strophe and antistrophe in turn—each understanding no word spoken by the other—and understanding every word perfectly. Afterwards I discovered that she was a Russian, and considered within myself that now I knew what was meant by the apostolic gift of tongues."

There was nothing in that to cause disquiet. Elsie



might not have been by her husband's side because of any one of a score of good reasons. And the phrase about "unexpected sympathy" probably was not intended to mean what Marjorie feared. She realized this; nevertheless she feared.

This was followed by others that told her that John had managed to obtain a job, but at a salary which her practical feminine mind could estimate was insufficient for the needs of a man with a wife to support, without the confirmation which his evident growing depression of spirits supplied. He spoke of their distaste for New York, of their isolation in that city where they were without friends and where they felt themselves to be aliens.

"You know," he wrote, "I used to share with most Englishmen the muddled idea that the United States are still in some undefined way a sort of British Colony. The fact is, however, that an Englishman is more of a foreigner in this country than he would be, I will not say anywhere else in the world, but anywhere on the Continent.

"In our loneliness any English voice or face is gratefully welcome. One day while I was walking back from the office to our little flat, I felt a hand seize my arm from behind. I stopped and swung round to see who had accosted me. It was Burly Bursleydon, not less burly but more sleekly prosperous than he had been in Golders Green. We greeted one another heartily, for I cannot tell you how glad I was to meet anyone from England. My old contempt for the missionary vanished from my mind, completely forgotten in the joy of meeting one who seemed to be, among those desolating New York throngs, a dear intimate friend. 'Why, Mr. Bursley-

don,' I said, nearly crying with delight, 'whatever are you doing here?'

"The evangelist answered, 'I had a call a couple of months ago to a church.'

"'Meltonian?' I enquired.

"'Oh, yes. You hardly supposed that I have become an Episcopal minister!' and Bursleydon laughed at his small ecclesiastical joke.

"'I didn't know that Meltonianism was established in New York,' I said in surprise.

"'Oh, we are few,' he answered, adopting his professionally pious manner. 'Mine is the only Meltonian Church in this city, but the Lord is prospering us—' (evidently, thought I). 'And,' Bursleydon added, as an afterthought, 'has enabled me to be instrumental in the saving of many souls. . . . I hope you will join my congregation.'

"To that invitation I made no reply, but offered instead an invitation of my own, that Mr. Bursleydon should go home with me to dinner. This the prosperous servant of God did, eating largely of the curry and rice provided at our table, and making himself very agreeable. He soon perceived that this was not an occasion for working in his proper professional field, so put aside his pastoral cloak and stood forth, for at least one evening, as a man of heavy though genial humor. We thoroughly enjoyed the old humbug's society and his stories—both familiar enough—because they had about them something of the air of England. . . . "

The winter had dragged wearily away for Marjorie, for other hints of financial and domestic difficulties—though John's letters rarely referred directly to Elsie in any intimate fashion—came through the gloom that

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enveloped New York. She brought him and his wife the secret aid of her prayers; it was all she could do for them.

Just after Easter a letter had arrived from New York that was for her like the opening of April buds. It reached her on a day of delicate sunshine and seemed to bring with it the beginning of Spring. After she had read it in her room she ran downstairs and out into the garden to read it again.

"DEAR OLD MARJORIE,—I am sure you wondered in that wise heart of yours why I have not said anything about Catholicism. Perhaps it is because when one is not very near to the Faith that one can talk about it easily; for as one draws near a hushed reticence falls upon the soul. I resisted up to the last minute, carefully manufacturing doubts in a pretense of sincerity. That's over now, thank God!

"The climax came at *Tenebræ* in the Cathedral. I had walked in there one evening during Holy Week and found myself amidst a huge crowd of the pious and the curious and the musical who had come for their special purposes. The surge of the numbers of souls about me, none of whom I knew, gave me a sense of loneliness and detachment greater, perhaps, than could have been attained in complete isolation. I was able to be hidden.

"The Archbishop, robed in splendid purple, entered and took his throne by the high altar. Then a high, thin voice began in the ghostly distance:

*Deus in adjutorium meum intende.*

"It died away plaintively like a whispered sob. The choir answered, dealing out each note as slowly and separately as so many pearls:

*Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina.*

"The great drama had begun, with a great cry for deliverance:

*Salvum me fac, Deus: quoniam intraverunt aquae usque ad animam meam.*

"I sat with my hand over my face while the strong voices

of the men of the choir and the clear sword-like tones of the boys opened up heaven for me. Then the psalm came to an end and the antiphon, that relic of the Greek chorus, fulfilling the same purpose of reconciling men to the gods, broke in very, very softly:

*Zelus domus tuae comedit me, et opprobria, exprobatium tibi, ceciderunt super me.*

"One of the fifteen candles upon the triangular candlestick was extinguished by an acolyte and the psalms began again. I sat spellbound; here, rich in allegory and significance, was being enacted in quiet solemnity the divine tragedy. Light after light went out upon the great candlesticks, and I felt the terrible portent as though I beheld star and star fail in the sky. No sudden cataclysm here, but the slow failure of all things, symbolized in the sweet wailing notes of the priest as he read the Lamentations.

*Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo; facta est quasi vidua domina gentium: princeps provinciarum facta est sub tributo.*

"Then with infinite yearning and wet with the tears of Christ weeping over the holy city came the cry,

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum.*

"With a terrible, heart-breaking beauty the shadows were gathering and darkness falling upon the face of the earth. The last candle was placed behind the high altar. *Christus factus est pro nobis obediens usque ad mortem.* Several thousand men knelt in the darkness, silent except for the murmur of the *Miserere* thrilled with the intensity of the culminating moment. A voice far away prayed:

*Respice, quaesumus, Domine super hanc familiam tuam, pro qua Dominus Noster Jesus Christus non dubitavit manibus tradi nocentium et Cruis subire tormentum.* Then came a sudden crash and the lights flooded the cathedral.

"The switching on of the electric light in that huge darkened building brought me a light that was spiritual. There seemed to be a natural, inevitable correspondence between the two forms of illumination. The lamentable tragedy dramatized here coincided with the derelictions of

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my soul. The promise of Easter resurrection with which it closed coincided with the fact of a vivid faith arisen. I had feared it so long, resisting it half-heartedly, and now that I surrendered I did so without any painful upheaval. . . .

"I am afraid my enthusiasm will make you smile—and I know quite well that I am teaching my grandmother to suck eggs. But though I love the Church so much that I take an artistic pleasure in seeing and celebrating her artistic qualities, of course my Catholicism is founded upon something more solid than a ritual carried out with dignity.

"So smile if you like, Marjorie; but please remember that everybody who is in love is a bore. And I am wildly in love with the Catholic Church.

"I am now under instruction by a clever young Irishman—Father Ryan. He is the first priest to whom I have spoken, and my first words to him were 'I want to be received into the Church'—so, you see, I did not waste much time in coming to the point. I shall, if all goes well, be received by Whitsun.

"My only sorrow is that Elsie is terribly distressed, poor child. She seems to take my wanting to become a Catholic as a reflection upon herself. I know you will pray for us. God knows, we need your prayers.

"This is a stiff and stilted letter. We both send our love. Good-by. I'll write again before long. Dear old Marjorie!  
JOHN."

A fortnight later the shattering blow fell, and a few heart-broken lines from John told Marjorie of how Elsie had had a little daughter nearly two months before the baby had been expected, and that both the mother and the child had died. A terrible cry came out of those few closely written words. "God is cruel! Just when it looked as if our lives would have their tangles unraveled, God plays such a trick upon us!"

There was a long silence after this letter, a longer interval between it and the next than there had ever

been. When it came it was headed "Philadelphia. P.O. Box 9362," and ran:

"What a fool I've been. . . . Brain fever bowled me over, and I am told that for over a week I was hourly expected to die. Father Ryan found me and received me into the Church *in extremis*. He knew nothing of the rebellion in my soul; only that my mind and body were ill. I was unconscious, delirious. It was a nightmare dreamed in a bed of hell. . . .

"Then heavy seas suddenly subsided. They had roared and broken around my body. The current changed, and up, up through cool water I went till I came to the air of day. The breakers were left behind. I was in the sheltering shade of a quiet river. I opened my eyes, and they lighted upon a strange, silent, spacious room. There were beds in long rows, running down either side. I thought I was dreaming of my school dormitory, until I grew conscious of my head. When I put my hands to it I felt an ice-bandage there. Where had it come from? As I was wondering vaguely a nurse, seeing me stir, came to my bed and bent over me. She had a very plain but very kind face, in which the gaiety of her eyes strove with gravity.

"How do you feel?" she asked me.

"I looked up at her. She was not in a nurse's uniform, though she wore a hospital apron. Over her gray serge dress flapped two large wings of starched linen. Some sort of a nun evidently, though in a habit less interesting than that usually worn by nuns. I seemed to have seen it before somewhere. I did not answer her question; but asked another instead. 'Where am I?'

"You are in the Chantal Hospital,' she replied.

"I shut my eyes for a moment, trying to remember.

There were so many things in my mind, fragments of dreams full of conflict and excitement. . . . The judge had just finished summing up—it nearly all went against me—the jury had been out of their box a long time; why hadn't they come back to announce their verdict? . . . No, no, that was all part of the dream. I tried to say something to the nurse; but she only told me to try to go to sleep again.

"I obeyed her as if I were a child, and went off in deep peace. When I opened my eyes again it was because there were voices calling to me, it seemed as if from an immense distance. Father Ryan was by my bed. Then he told me that I had been received into the Church because they thought that I was dying.

"Well, I'm perfectly well now, Marjorie, though rather pulled down. I've managed to get a job here selling books; so don't worry about me.

"What a fool I've been—cursing God and aiming at Him my impotent blows! What a fool I've been. My contemplations always lead me back to that point!

"I can't write about Elsie or that little child I had to bury with her. I can't, I daren't write about that even to you. But I wanted to tell you that Elsie was received into the Church on her deathbed, so she was a Catholic before me after all. And I have had a taste of the Divine irony. And that impels me to say again, for the last time, *what* a fool I've been!"

This was the last letter Marjorie had received from her brother, and it had reached her six weeks ago. She was puzzled by his silence, though she possessed the reassurance that he was now a Catholic and had recovered from his collapse. But he must have suffered and be still suffering terribly, despite his reticence. A

certain flippancy in his tone showed that he was wincing under the lash and trying to conceal the fact. He had experienced Love and Pain and had seen Death face to face. Any one of this vital trinity can make, mark, or mar a man; coming together they are certain completely to change him. So much is inevitable, though the nature of the change they effect is always incalculable.

Marjorie remembered how Michael Donovan had prophesied that John would have to suffer—to be broken, that was how he put it—before he could be received. Michael, she reflected, was extraordinarily discerning.

She had read all John's letters an hour ago. It had now got far too dark to read his small handwriting, or, indeed, to read at all. Otherwise, she would have taken up that poem of Michael's which John had sent on to her from Philadelphia. And yet there was no need for her to read it, since the lines were printed upon her memory, which could recall even the characteristic formation of the letters. She was thankful that John had sent on not a copy but the original manuscript. She would be able to look at it later; now she crooned the poem softly to herself, sitting at the window, looking at the deepening black of the trees and the last dull gold gleams upon the sky beyond.

“‘FOR THEY SHALL POSSESS THE EARTH.’

“You who were Beauty's worshiper,  
Her ardent lover, in this place  
You have seen Beauty face to face,  
And now the wistful eyes of her;  
And kissed the hands of Poverty,  
And praised her tattered bravery.



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"You shall be humble, give your days  
To silence and simplicity;  
And solitude shall come to be  
The goal of all your winding ways.  
When pride and youthful pomp of words  
Fly far away like startled birds.

"Possessing nothing, you shall know  
The heart of all things in the earth,  
Their secret agonies and mirth,  
The awful innocence of snow,  
The sadness of November leaves,  
The joy of fields of girded sheaves.

"A shelter from the driving rain  
Your high renouncement of desire,  
Food it shall be and wine and fire;  
And Peace shall enter once again  
As quietly as dreams in sleep  
The hidden trysting place you keep.

"You shall grow humble as the grass,  
And patient as each slow, dumb beast;  
And as their fellow—yes, the least—  
Yield stoat and hedgehog room to pass,  
And learn the ignorance of men  
Before the robin and the wren.

"The things so terrible and sweet  
You strove to say in accents harsh,  
The frogs are croaking on the marsh,  
The crickets chirping at your feet—  
Oh, they shall teach you unafraid  
The meaning of the songs you made.

"Till, clothed in white humilities,  
Each happening that doth befall,  
Each thought of yours be musical—  
As wind is musical in the trees;  
When strong as sun and clean as dew,  
Your old dead songs come back to you."

She thought of her lover's magnanimity, glorying in what was the cause of her own pain. And this poem amply emphasized her loss, for there was a footnote at the foot of the page. "This will be the last poem that I shall write. Aubrey Beardsley once said in a letter that I have never forgotten, though I read it years ago, and though I have only recently come to understand the dark saying: 'The Christian must sacrifice his art for God just as Mary Magdalen sacrificed her beauty.'" These were the same words that Michael had said as he walked with her to the 'bus the evening before he left the world to enter a monastery. These were the last words, except the formal farewell, she had heard Michael speak, and they struck her heart like swords. She seemed to complete the antithesis. She was the renunciant of her own beauty, where Michael was the renunciant of his art. . . .

During that month of English summer when she came to know him there was a secret hidden by her will from her heart—or had her heart hidden it from her wayward will? She could not have said with any certainty then or now. But it was hidden, only that another might find it. That other had renounced the search. He also possessed hidden secrets of his own—but those secrets were not hidden from himself, but from Marjorie—or so at least he imagined.

As soon as the 'bus had gone on in obedience to the conductor's bell that evening twelve months ago, leaving Michael standing waving to his departing guests, the necessity for emotional restraint disappeared. Throughout that ride, when she had sat with Elsie on the front seat on the top of the 'bus, her spirit had sung "Magnificat." She could acknowledge her love to herself now—because her lover was about to vow

himself to the service of Heaven, and was for ever unobtainable. She could acknowledge her love to herself because the last look her lover gave her revealed his own soul. She had suspected before; now she knew. She was aware that he would gradually cease from loving her as his divine love increased; it was inevitable that that should happen in time. What Donovan did must be taken as a determination to sacrifice everything for God; and he was thorough in all his actions; one might say that he was ruthless. But he had given her—unawares—a signal of love, the last she would receive. It could not content her; yet it made her proud.

To put away love by main force, as Michael must, was comparatively easy. Suppression could be achieved by continuous effort and by degrees. Marjorie never tried to suppress or sacrifice her affections. She scorned to do so. The monk was called upon by his vow to lay aside his dearest desire. But she was not called upon to renounce anything save her will. As the matter did not remain in her hands, as she had no choice, she could hardly be said even to have sacrificed her will, except in so far as she loyally endorsed a step which she would have been powerless to prevent. This endorsement she gave generously, praying for Michael as for a monk, not as for her lover.

There came seasons when the very frankness of her heart made her path hard. That single sign was little to subsist on; and pride a heavy load to carry. To God she had cried, "I love Michael with the whole of my strength. Thou hast taken him and I do not grudge him to Thee. Whether I could give him up were I able to refuse, I do not know—but I do not ask Thee to give him back to me. But give me grace to bear my lack?"

Lately she had been depressed occasionally. No one

might have noticed more than a greater gravity in her demeanor, but she was depressed and pleaded day after day for grace. She also began to feel that she must buttress up her wearying resolution by some definite decisive act.

A friend, a young-elderly French lady, who was her chief intimate in Chantilly, observed the change in Marjorie—slight, yet not too slight to escape her. The ultimate cause was not so much as hinted at; neither was it guessed. The immediate cause was disclosed: Marjorie thought she ought to enter a convent.

Mademoiselle Brisset was a devotee. Ten years ago she tried her vocation among the Dominicans, and left the order after wearing its noble black and white habit for nearly the complete period of the novitiate. Her health broken down under the stress of an unmitigated rule; but the Prioress adways declared that Sister Mary Aquinas (the Dominicans, like most religious communities, have the absurd custom of giving male names to their nuns) really broke down under the stress of her unauthorized and unwise penances. The devotee thought she could make amends for her own failure to enter the religious state by persuading other people to do so. She was overjoyed at being consulted by Marjorie (whom she never visualized in her wildest moments of fervor as a member of an order) and gave her the full benefit of her advice.

"Ah, Marjorie, so you would be a nun? If only God had given *me* your vocation!"

"But, Jacqueline, I'm not sure that it is my vocation. That's what I want to find out."

"Yes, it is, it is!" Mademoiselle Brisset murmured rapturously. "I always knew it, though I didn't like to say anything." The devotee was quite carried away

by the enthusiasm that completely eclipsed her astonishment at hearing that Marjorie had any idea of the cloister. "I knew it, my dear—from the first. A heavenly life!" she cried.

Every religious body contains a certain number of excellent, irresponsible and impossible women who edify one by their excellence, horrify one by their irresponsibility, and scarify one by their impossibility. The Catholic Church has its share of these women—though in the Catholic Church their irresponsibility can be kept within limits. Accordingly they do less damage there than elsewhere. Still, not even the subtle wisdom or discipline of Rome was sufficient to prevent Jacqueline Brisset, ex-sister Mary Aquinas of St. Dominic's order, from constituting herself as spiritual director to other pious ladies. She pounced on Marjorie with holy glee; for it was not often that she got such a chance of driving anybody into a convent.

"My dear," she said, "I know the world and I know the cloister. Avail yourself of my experience!"

Marjorie smiled at her friend's indiscretion. She had no intention of being rushed off her feet like this. Jacqueline was a charming person, despite her peculiarities, but she was rather too prone to extravagance. One could not be angry with her; one could not help being amused.

Mademoiselle Brisset perceived that she had overshoot the mark. "You laugh, Marjorie! Ah, well, laugh; I do not mind. I say no more." She was not offended; she could not afford to be if she was to win this soul. "You will not mind going to see the Abbess? No? You go alone and hear what she thinks. Only come and tell me afterwards."

There could be no objection to consulting the Abbess of the Benedictines. Marjorie walked over the next day; rang the harsh bell at the convent gate; was admitted by Sœur Madeline, the wrinkled old doorkeeper, and asked for the Abbess. The little round, sound, sweet apple-like face was soon beaming on her out of its white starched coif and the Abbess was laughing at the account given of the devotee.

"Ah, poor Jacqueline! She was at school here. A great trial, my dear, a great trial! She has a good heart but no sense!"

The Abbess sat down facing her visitor and folded her plump hands beneath her scapular. They did not remain there for long. In turn they patted Marjorie's hands, gesticulated or played with her pectoral cross. But they always returned to the scapular after every excursion.

The girl found it much easier to talk to this kind, wise, merry woman than to Jacqueline Brisset. She also had more confidence in the abbess' level-headedness and was prepared to be guided by her. The apple face grew graver, though responsive gleams of humor came every now and then into the abbess' eyes. She heard the story to the end, helping it along with an occasional question. Then she delivered her judgment. "Miss Bradley, you would not be unhappy as a nun—I know you pretty well. You are cheerful and you are able to laugh—that is half the battle in a religious order. But then that is half the battle in the world as well. The question really is not whether you could put up with the restraint of the rule, but whether you are called to obey it. Have you—in short—the supernatural gifts in addition to those which are natural, I

would not refuse to take you if you feel that you must come to us—say in six months' time. But I am certain that you will not want to come then."

Marjorie was struck by the remark. She was aware that her claustral moods passed. This mood would pass, as the previous moods had passed. That was why she had not delayed in seeking advice at the convent. The abbess was right.

"Is it not so?" the older woman asked, putting her hand on the younger woman's arm. She paused before going on again. "I do not want to discourage you, my dear. It is a matter that must be settled between you and God. But I give you my opinion. I was novice-mistress here before I became abbess; and I know that it is often difficult to decide the question of vocation. You must decide it for yourself. If you believe by Easter that you have a vocation, come back and tell me so. There, go—and may God bless you."

Marjorie went over the details of her visit to the Abbess as she sat at her window. It had taken place just over a week ago. During that week she had been to see Mademoiselle Brisset, according to promise, and had told her of what happened at the interview. Jacqueline went round to the convent that same afternoon to reproach the Abbess for sending so suitable a subject away. A playful pinch of the ear was the only rebuke she received. "Ah, Jacqueline, the Holy Father would not be so sure as you are. Moderate your infallibility and all will be well."

Marjorie was ignorant of the mild reproof her friend had received. She guessed (correctly) that a *novena* was being made for her vocation. She already knew that she was not to be a nun. She was sorry at knowing it. Her life would be easier in the cloister. . . .

One faint star came out in the sky. The Crechets had gone into the house a quarter of an hour ago. The whisper of cold became more distinct. It was time to shut the window. She got up from the wicker work chair in which she had been sitting and reached up to pull the glass down. Just then a motor-horn hooted and a car came up the drive. The girl's curiosity allowed the window to remain open. Her eyes saw a man jump out in great haste and pull furiously at the bell. The man's face was hidden; but as the hall door was unfastened by the servant, a beam struck the young figure, revealing it as John's. Instantly Marjorie flew to the landing and then down the stairs, in time to hear her brother ask in bad French, "*Ma sœur, est-elle chez lui?*" Before the slightly puzzled servant could answer in reply to her questioner's peculiar idiom, Marjorie had flung herself upon John. Her arms were about his neck and she was sobbing.

"I say, have you five francs handy, Marjorie?" was his first remark as soon as his sister's affectionate but embarrassing onslaught subsided. "I've cleared myself out. The taxi-driver's still waiting."

She ran off again and the taxi's passenger had a breathing space granted by the fact that he landed with less than ten American dollars in his pocket. These barely covered his fare to Chantilly; they did not cover his fare from the station. Home-comings always made one feel strange. He was glad to escape the first fury of hugging with which he had been threatened, and at the moment when Marjorie, having paid the taxi-driver and shut the hall door, was returning to her demonstration of frustrated endearment, the bell rang noisily through the house announcing dinner.



## CHAPTER II

"What will the Crechets think about my bursting in on them so uncereemoniously?" John asked.

Marjorie laughed merrily. "When you do an uncereemonious thing, the best course is to take the propriety of your action for granted. But you know the Crechets well enough to be able to guess," she added. "They'd have felt hurt if you *hadn't* relied upon their friendliness. I'd have been hurt too. Of *course* you came straight on to me."

"Here is my brother, Cecily," said Marjorie, leading John into the dining room. "He has just arrived from America."

Marjorie was, or, more strictly, had been, a sort of glorified governess to Madame Crechet's children before they had grown old enough to go to school, but she stood on a very different footing than do most governesses. Her mother and Cecily's eldest sister had been at school together. Marjorie and Cecily were friends.

Madame Crechet advanced to welcome him in the enthusiastic manner characteristic of her.

"I must apologize——" he began, awkwardly.

"Apologize? For what? For coming here! . . . Marjorie, how tired he looks, and I'm sure he's hungry."

John was very tired. The haggard, hunted look that had been his six months ago had gone out of his eyes, but his illness and privations had left their mark upon him, and his thinness and pallor, accentuated by his tiredness, shocked the two ladies.

"He looks half dead, Cecily," Marjorie replied. "It's

about time he came back. . . . I never imagined that you were so pulled down, John."

"Nonsense!" he smiled wearily as he spoke, "It's only that I'm tired after my journey."

"Come, John; sit down and eat some food," said Madame Crechet. "We'll talk afterwards. You're going to be treated as a convalescent—so that's settled."

Monsieur Crechet passed some very good Burgundy over to the guest, and the wine glowed gently along his jaded nerves, and John ate a few mouthfuls, when he was allowed to do so by his inquisitorial hostess, who, in spite of her genuine concern for his bodily nourishment, was herself even more hungry for information than he for food. When the servant took away his third half-emptied plate Cecily Crechet was concerned, exclaiming, in a tone of the profoundest distress,

"But you're not taking anything!"

Her husband's mild ironic eyes glittered with amusement as he replied, "You won't let him eat anything, Cecily."

John laughed outright. "Oh, I feel——"

Madame Crechet cut in with "Oh, but Emile, I have done nothing else except press him to eat!"

"Yes, Cecily, you have done *nothing* else except press him. If you would leave him alone for a few minutes. . . ." The mild ironic eyes again glittered with amusement, and John obtained his ten minutes' freedom from talk, or eight of them.

It was Marjorie who renewed the questioning. "What boat did you come over on?"

"I came on the 'Maxwell,'" he answered, "a slow boat of the Green-Funnel Line, and I worked my way."

"You did what?" Madame Crechet demanded, unable to contain her curiosity any longer.

John smiled broadly. "I worked my passage. I looked after cattle on the voyage over."

"Marjorie," cried Cecily, agog with excitement, "this promises to be exciting."

"Don't you mind them, my boy," said Monsieur Crechet. "Go on with your food."

"Oh, the fat's in the fire. I shall have to tell them. Besides, I really have had all I want to eat—really, so fire away, Cecily," John answered, laying down his fork and lifting his glass to his lips.

"But why *did* you work your passage?" Cecily began, coming at once to the point.

"Why? Because I wanted to come to England very badly, and I had no money for my fare. I saw an advertisement by an agent for cattle hands, so I applied to be taken on. Free passage back, but no pay."

Marjorie was now as interested as Cecily. And Monsieur Crechet seemed anxious to hear the story of this adventure.

"Well, I may as well tell you what happened," said John, lighting Marjorie's cigarette and then his own.

"I was told to report at the dock where the 'Maxwell' lay; so, having packed my trunk and a Gladstone, I had them carted there and after the usual formalities went on board.

"The look of my companions frightened me; the ship's accommodation for the cattle-hands was rough in the extreme. There was, however, little time for worrying, for a huge Irishman came up the hatchway and bellowed 'Bloke!' (I found that being an Englishman I had to answer to what was thought to be an appropriate appellation. Nearly all the hands acquired nick-

names before the voyage was out.) I turned round and followed the Irishman downstairs. That man also had his nickname. He was known as the 'Black Bull.' It fitted him perfectly. When the various foremen appeared to round up their gangs for work, I fell to the Black Bull."

Madame Crechet lit another cigarette. She seemed to be inclined to ask a question, but changed her mind, determined upon listening.

"I followed at the tail of the party until they reached a small hold; above this hung a rope and pulley. The Black Bull, taking one of the men with him, jumped down into the hold, which was full of wire-bound trusses of hay. Three of the remaining seven hauled up the bales from below as the hooks were pushed through the binding wires, and I and the other three were ordered to carry the hay along the gangways, and to drop a bale every ten yards.

"My companion was quite equal to carrying his end of a two hundred weight bundle, but my arms, and especially my small hands, could not support their burden. The bales were dropped every half-minute, while I rubbed my numb members. Then the Bull came up from the hold, irritated by the slowness with which the bales were carried and roared at me all the obscenity that he could think of at the moment. Then he disappeared again.

"So I thought out a plan. It would be easier for each man to take a bale, I imagined, and roll it over, corner to corner, along the passage. The plan worked, for if the bale went more slowly than by being carried, two men could be occupied with two separate bales, and the stronger was not hindered by the weaker. The hay was at length distributed; a hatchet came into play

to burst the wires. After that it was an easy matter to pitch-fork the hay into the pens.

"This having been accomplished, the Black Bull announced that it was time to get our things if we wanted them. We were accordingly taken to the quartermaster, who served out to each of us a plate, a cup of tin, a knife, a fork, and a spoon. So much for our domestic articles. As my bedding I received two coarse blankets, and two bags, one large and one small. These, when filled with straw, served as my mattress and pillow. Every one of these articles had to be signed for by the recipient, who had also to accept meekly a dreadful imprecation in case of failure to return the articles. The blankets seemed clean, or tolerably so, and the straw was fresh and white. Then I made my bed for the night.

"At five o'clock came tea; a table was released from the ceiling of the cabin; bread and large pots of jam and marmalade and an urn of tea already mixed with milk and sugar were brought in. The heavy work had made the men hungry. At any rate, I was hungry." Cecily's husband looked at her and smiled for some obscure reason.

"Then more work until eight o'clock. This time bags of corn—strictly speaking, maize—were hauled up from the hold and distributed to the cattle. The Black Bull roared at me again, but did not use actual physical violence; he had been placated by the promise of the present of my working suit at the end of the voyage—though I have often wondered how the foreman managed to fit his bulk inside. The work was heavier even than the rolling of the bales of hay, but fortunately did not last so long, and with the sweeping up of the gangways the day came to an end.

"The dining cabin served as the general sleeping quarters. It contained about forty-five bunks, upon which the straw bedding, the blankets, and the personal luggage of the men were laid. Work at an end, most of us took off our boots, wrapped the blankets about ourselves, and lay down. Not yet to sleep. A Belgian drew out his mandolin and played 'Ueber die Wellen' to the company. That at an end songs became the fashion, the latest drivel from Vaudeville. I desperately wanted to sleep, but could not. As the *finale* to the entertainment the body of men wound up with the Sankey and Moody hymn:—

'Oh, where is my wandering boy to-night,  
Oh, where is my boy to-night?'

"This was always the good-night piece, though on one or two occasions the maudlin rubbish of the 'Glory Song' preceded it, but that was only when the company was in an unusually pious mood.

"By eleven o'clock thirty-five stertorious groans and whistlings took the place of the Belgian's mandolin and the hymns, and sleep fell quickly upon the stiff heavy bodies.

"At four o'clock a little Jew who had feigned seasickness (and who probably had given a bribe to the overseer to gain his appointment as night watchman) came into the cabin bearing a lantern and a bell. There was no delay, no second sleep, no pillow to throw at the alarm clock. The Black Bull was bellowing, 'Come along, Louis, or I'll bash your brains out. Are you there, Bloke? Stir your bones!' In ten minutes all of us men, dashing sleep from our misty eyes, followed our leaders out.

"Until eight o'clock the time was occupied in water-

ing the cattle. Buckets were filled from a hose and carried along the gangways to the cattle. As often as not the thirsty, impatient beasts would nose over their drink; here and there a big shaggy creature would lap up two buckets. On an average each heifer required a full bucket of water as her share. The work was done at top speed, to the tune of many curses. With aching limbs and drenched clothing we returned to breakfast. Watering would not take place again until the following morning.

"When the gangs went out to work once more, I was sent down into the hold. Crawling so as to avoid striking my head, I dragged the heavy bales to the hook of the pulley, curses from the foreman descending upon me. Something worse than words once came, when the Black Bull threw his truncheon at my head. Fortunately the aim was not quite accurate. Grazing my shoulder, the heavy club fell with a clatter upon the woodwork beyond."

"What an awful man," put in Marjorie.

"Oh, I soon got used to it," John answered her. "He wasn't so bad, really. It was only his playful little way, I suppose."

He knocked the cigarette ash off into the saucer of his coffee-cup and continued,

"At a quarter to eleven I went up on deck for a smoke. The ship was far out of sight of land. We must be, I thought quite two hundred miles out upon the ocean. Could I have walked back to Philadelphia the leagues would have daunted me less than the terrors of the ship. I felt sick at heart, faced with what was beyond my endurance.

"Sick in body, too, in half-an-hour's time, when the bell rang for dinner. A large tin trough stood upon the

table, and a dish of potatoes. I took my plate and harpooned a piece of meat with my fork. I avoided the greasy part of the stew, but found the potatoes good. I could not eat the rancid salt pork. With potatoes and bread, however, I satisfied myself as best I could. The other men, or most of them, had no such squeamish stomachs and scraped the stew-dish clean.

"I lay on my bunk after my meal, feeling as if I were about to die. But the Black Bull showed no sympathy. 'The work must be done,' he roared, 'so get up, you dog.' So until tea time I was employed, along with the other members of the gang, in serving the bags of corn to the cattle, after which, with the approach of evening, work was at an end for the day.

"Antwerp was the destination of the ship. I and one or two others among the hands meant to disembark at London; the rest would go on with the ship to Antwerp. We received no pay for the voyage, in fact most of us had paid five dollars to the padrone for his good offices as employment agent, and having paid that sum we boarded the decks with empty pockets. One of the men, for instance, had forty cents at the commencement of the trip. Skillful play at cards, or luck, or cheating, had given him now six dollars, but only at the expense of others who had lost the money to pay for their board at Antwerp. They all would have to spend a week on shore at their own expense; the steamship company undertook to convey them back to America for nothing, but refused to allow anyone to stay on board in harbor. How a man can live for a week in Antwerp, a stranger unused to the foreign language, I do not know. But nobody appeared to worry. There are, no doubt, means of subsistence, occult, but effective.



"As the voyage wore on I began to enjoy life more. The work lightened, or became easier, and less with practice; and the companionship of those rough men was in the main by no means unpleasant.

"The food, greasy as it was, and impossible to my stomach, offered in its accessories of bread and jam support enough. Healthy work and deep sleep supplied the remaining needs of the body. There were also other compensations. I appreciated not having to wash—when filth descended inevitably the next hour—and luxuriated in an unshaven face. In my oldest clothes I could loll on the deck during the forenoon, smoking my rapidly decreasing store of tobacco. (Later on cadging friends and my own necessities drove me to stealing leaf tobacco from the cargo, though the pure, strong dry leaf was not a great success.) With my back against an air funnel, I could stretch myself in the sun and doze like some rather disreputable but happy cat. The weather was bright and young with the Spring, and no rain fell except on one day. That day was hell, and during that day I was grateful for my new and lurid stock of oaths. Something exceptional was needed to do justice to the situation.

"The next day, being clean and hearty, brought not only relief but an enjoyment which lasted and increased to the end of the voyage. By the time the distant light from Eddystone shone through the early dark my enjoyment of my work and life was nearly as keen as my ecstasy of expectation.

"One morning I was able to lie out on the deck after breakfast, knowing that a few hours later my feet would be on English soil. It was worth being in exile, worth all the pain and poverty and disappointment, to know what it meant to return. 'Happy who like Ulysses

. . . ' and I repeated Chesterton's admirable rendering of Du Bellay to myself. You know the thing, don't you, Marjorie?

"There never had been such a tenderly radiant morning as that, when the channel coiled and glittered and beamed in the sunlight, and the grass of England stretched smooth and consoling above the white cliffs of Kent. We were quite close to the shore and saw Dover and Folkestone, and the houses which looked so small and fresh and friendly in the morning air. One had to lose England in order to find her again. . . .

"There, that's about all." And he suddenly grew silent.

"What a dreadful experience!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"Not so dreadful when you got used to it, though I admit to having toned my story down a good deal so as not to shock your ears and Cecily's. I enjoyed it thoroughly after the first two days. All the same, I don't think I'd have the courage to attempt it a second time."

### CHAPTER III.

**W**HEN his hostess, aided and abetted by Marjorie, declared that he was to be treated as a convalescent, John protested, humorously but not very vigorously, against the régime imposed upon him. The ex-cattle-hand was ordered by his sister, as she said good night, not to get up until lunch, and he dutifully obeyed, finding it exceedingly pleasant to change a straw mattress upon a hard wood bunk for a feather mattress, linen sheets, and the comfort of a French bed.

He awoke by force of habit at four o'clock, half ex-

pecting to hear the imprecations of the Black Bull; but as silence held possession of the darkness he turned over upon his other side and went off to sleep again. He did not wake until nearly nine, to find that Marjorie had set his breakfast on a table by the side of his bed and that she was drawing the blinds.

She pulled a wicker chair out from the corner of the room, and sat down to watch him eat. "Go on, John dear, I won't ask you any questions—and Cecily won't come in to bother you."

"This is better than the cattle boat," he said, when he had finished.

"Where is your pipe?" she asked.

"Over there, behind the vase on the mantelpiece. The pouch is in the left pocket at the back of my trousers, and you'll find matches—oh, never mind, I see that there's a box on the table."

There is no better time for a pipe than just after breakfast and no better place for a smoke than bed (though the sublime doctrine is denied by most women); and the truth of this statement was demonstrated by the look of seraphic contentment that manifested itself upon John's face, as he half lay, half sat, against the pillows, puffing slowly at his pipe.

Marjorie, like all good women, was pleased to see her man enjoy material comfort; but she was too anxious for talk to be seraphically contented. Nevertheless, she was discreet. She knew that talk, or at least intimate talk, was inadvisable just at present. It would be a delicate matter, needing tact. There was no possibility of avoiding profound emotion, and she was not sure whether she dared risk emotion, or whether John would dare, even under the best of conditions. Certainly it was not the time just after breakfast, par-

ticularly after breakfast in bed. So she curled herself up in her chair and looked at her brother's contented face.

But he did not appear averse to talk, at least, not easy, gently reminiscent talk, that seemed to him, if not to Marjorie, to be without pain.

"I suppose you don't know that I am very proud of having lived for a part of the time I was in Philadelphia on twenty-five cents a day?"

"My dear John!" she cried, "I always thought America was so expensive."

He laughed. "So it is—that's why I'm proud of my ingenious economy. . . . After my billposting job came to an end and I found that I couldn't make any money as a book-tout or by trying to sell sewing-machines——"

Marjorie was aghast. "After bill-posting and being a book-tout!" she repeated, "What new horrors?"

John waved the interruption aside. "I'll tell you about that later. Listen to the story of how I lived in Philadelphia on twenty-five cents a day. I had a room rent-free at a settlement in return for looking after the boys' games-room two evenings a week—so my only expenses were for food. My breakfast consisted of a portion of grape-nuts, a banana, and a couple of dough-nuts. I had a similar menu for supper, and a mid-day dinner at a ten-cent eating house that I had discovered in the shabby part of the town, where for a 'dime' they served me with two large fish-cakes and as many water biscuits as I needed.

"Breakfast and supper cost together about fifteen cents, and that included the necessary sugar and milk for the grape-nuts. As my staple drink was water—tea and coffee, to say nothing of beer, were impossible

luxuries—I found that I could subsist on a quarter of a dollar a day. Fortunately the spring of the year was beginning, for in cold weather such enforced asceticism would certainly have resulted in illness. Even as it was, I felt impelled every now and then to cast aside economy. When a mood of this sort seized me I would go to a restaurant and spend half-a-dollar upon a meal which, if not square, was at least oblong. Upon my return, I would lie awake in bed repenting of my extravagance, and try to perform penance the next day by avoiding so much as the smell of fish-cakes. Instead I would buy a five-cent bag of salt pea-nuts and eat them dolefully while walking the streets or sitting in Fairmount Park.

“But you must have been shockingly poor,” Marjorie cried, “to be obliged to live like this!”

“I *was* poor,” John answered, smiling a little sadly; “only,” he added more cheerfully, “there was ‘my uncle.’ I don’t know what I would have done without him.”

“Who? I don’t understand.”

John was enjoying himself at Marjorie’s expense. “Don’t get cut up about it—I mean I had to go to the pawnshop. None of these things are so terrible as you think. You soon get used to them. But I must admit that my first visit was only paid after a great struggle. Even in Philadelphia, where nobody knew me, I couldn’t overcome the ingrained sense of shame attached to pawning my belongings. At last I determined on pledging my watch. It was worth five pounds when new, and should fetch ten dollars, I thought. But my heart failed me as I drew near to the sign of the three gilt balls; and I passed the shop. Then, as if my eye had caught sight of something in the window that in-

terested me, I returned and stood looking closely at a base imitation of a Japanese vase displayed for prospective customers. Actually I was trying to screw up enough courage to push the door open. Again I failed. This time, however, I walked leisurely around the entire block in which the shop was situated. The manœuver had the advantage of saving my consciousness of dignity by enabling me to return to the shop by the same direction in which I had originally approached it.

"The oily little Jew held the proffered silver watch—a present from Aunt Angela upon my fifteenth birthday—upon a fat, greasy palm, and then laid it down, saying carelessly, 'Three dollars.'

"But surely," answered I, "you can give me five dollars. They'd give me that for it anywhere."

"Then take it anyvare," said the Israelite. 'I'll give you three dollars.' And he began to busy himself with pushing half-a-dozen brown paper parcels into pigeon-holes.

"I told myself that I wasn't *selling* my watch. It was merely handed over as security on a loan. When I wanted to get it out again there would be less to repay than there would be if I obtained a greater advance now.

"All right. I'll take three dollars.'

"The Jew wrote out the pawn ticket without a word more and smacked three dirty 'greenbacks' upon the counter.

"The ice was broken. Visits were easy enough after this and became only too frequent. When the smaller articles (a pair of silver cuff links, a pigskin letter-case, and a fountain pen) had fetched one dollar sixty cents in the aggregate, bulkier articles were thrown into the abyss. When the time came for me to enter the pawn-

shop openly with big parcels under my arm, I had become quite callous. I no longer pretended to be a purchaser or stood outside ostentatiously valuing the camera or the silver cake-dish on view in the window, but walked straight in and dumped one blanket after another upon the counter. Upon each of them I was given half-a-dollar, and my overcoat brought me in three dollars."

"You poor darling boy!" Marjorie exclaimed, after hearing her brother's recital. "Did you ever get your things out?"

"No—I never could, Marjorie. But I didn't mind that. The real sacrifice was selling my books. Once when I was very hard up I went into a bookshop and saw that the average second-hand price appeared to be from one-half to one-third of the original cost. So I determined to sell my books. I kept a few back, a few favorites, and two hundred and seventy-three remained, which had cost about two hundred dollars. Even if I only received a quarter of the price I had paid that would mean fifty dollars. Then I could have made a fresh start.

"But when the man from the bookshop came he just cast an eye over the pile—he didn't even count the books—and said, 'Well, I can offer you fifteen dollars for the lot!'

"I was very much taken aback. I was prepared to let them go at fifty dollars, although seventy-five dollars was what I had intended to ask. 'Fifteen dollars!' I exclaimed. 'But they cost quite two hundred!'

"'Yes, I daresay they did,' my visitor replied. 'But fifteen dollars is all that they are worth to us.' He paused a moment and then said, 'Will you take it?'

"I was greatly distressed by the fact that after the

struggle my resolution to sell my little library had cost me, this book-seller should treat my sacrifice so unfeelingly. I raked out a copy of Pater's 'Marius the Epicurean.' 'Look!' I said reproachfully, 'that book cost me three and a half dollars!'

"The buyer was unmoved. 'I know exactly what every one of these books cost you. But I am not concerned with the price you bought them at, but with the price we can sell them for. I can only give you fifteen dollars.'"

"What else happened to you in Philadelphia?" Marjorie demanded, leaning forward to catch his reply. Maternal sorrow and sympathy were in her eye.

"Dear old Marjorie!" said John, distressed by her distress, and yet a little amused by it. "It wasn't so bad as you imagine.

"At first I couldn't get a job. Then I took on the house-to-house canvassing of sewing machines. I spent four hours walking up and down three streets, trying to muster up enough courage to ring the bell at one of the houses. Every time I reached out at the bell my skin all went 'goosey-flesh.' I couldn't do it—so I chucked that job up."

"And then?" persisted Marjorie.

"I did the bill-posting I told you about. I don't mean *real* bill-posting, but getting the shops to take in and display advertisement cards of some amateur theatrical performance. But that didn't last long."

"And the book-touting? That's what you called it, wasn't it?"

"Oh, I kept at that for several weeks, but I couldn't do any good at it. Some of the fellows made eighty dollars a week; I averaged about five. I was totally unable to persuade people that a year's subscription to



*Simpson's Weekly* with a free bonus of either a set of Emerson's works, Victor Hugo's novels, the tales of Guy du Maupassant, or a set of Rivington's pictures were necessary to their culture and peace of soul."

He ended, and a faint whimsical smile stole round the corners of his mouth. Marjorie's eyes were gazing into space, and she did not notice John's expression.

"What you must have suffered!" she murmured, in her soft musical voice.

"No, Marjorie dear, believe me, I felt detached, a looker-on, at all this."

He was silent for a full minute before continuing. Then he passed his hand across his brow with a gesture that was full of a sudden weariness.

"Philadelphia was a Paradise after New York. I couldn't stand it after——" His voice went husky and he stopped short. Marjorie's eyes brimmed with tears in unison with his condition. She did not speak, and John was grateful for the silence.

He broke the dangerous tension the next instant, for he saw by the clock that its hand was nearly at the hour for lunch. Greatly relieved, he recovered control of his voice and said,

"I'd better be getting up, Marjorie. Do you see what the time is?"

Marjorie was careful during the following days of her brother's stay of a week at Chantilly not to touch a wound that was still acutely painful. She also saw to it that Cecily Crechet clearly understood that no kind of reference must be made to the happenings in New York. She was not even to express sympathy. Everything connected with the tragedy must be left alone. The kindly shallow soul of Madame Crechet understood

and was obedient. Her sympathy was sincere but remained silent. Cecily, like Marjorie, was intensely eager to hear about the Philadelphian adventures; but they were exquisitely reticent about the deep sorrows through which John had passed.

One day the brother and sister were strolling together in the garden when the man lifted a corner of the veil of silence that hung over his tragedy. He approached the subject by the oblique method; even so, his face went gray and twitched as he spoke.

"Marjorie," he said, "I think you never quite did justice to Elsie—never appreciated her, if you like—" He paused a moment, and then went on again. "She could be extraordinarily generous. I think I told you that she was very much upset about my becoming a Catholic; though I am afraid I was a good deal to blame for that. I was such a prig, you know." He trembled, and his voice shook so much that he could not go on.

There was nothing for Marjorie to say, so she laid her hand gently upon his arm and then dropped it again.

"I was full of spiritual conceit. I probably tried to impress her. You know," he added, going off at a tangent, "I'm really a very ordinary sort of a man—only I was rather more stiff-necked and stupid than most people. . . ."

"I didn't understand—how could I?—about the baby. Her attitude about it I thought unnatural—and my fine sentiments made her furious. But it was all nerves. I ran no risk, but when the time came she died bravely at her post. She showed up so well and I showed up so badly. . . . Oh, I can't explain!"

"Well, don't try, John darling, unless it will relieve you," Marjorie replied, quietly.

"I want you to understand if you can, Marjorie." He went on once more. "Elsie was so splendid. She asked the nurse to baptize the baby. (The nurse was a Catholic, you know.) And she was received into the Church just before she died. And she asked my forgiveness, when it was I who ought to have gone down to kiss her feet—though I didn't know it then. We men are incapable of a hundredth part of the courage a woman can display. . . .

"Even then I attitudinized. I learned nothing, or very little. I went completely to pieces. What made it unendurable was the fact that right at the last we were brought very close together; we had never been in touch with one another until then—and just at that point it ended. It seemed to me that God had cheated me. It seemed to me that after I had fought through doubt to faith I deserved something better than I received.

"I became obsessed with resentment. I could only think of my wrongs and of the celestial impostor. I saw the world as an insane personal conspiracy designed for my torment. Every pair of lovers I passed in the street appeared to be mocking me. I returned their mockery with malignant scorn. Perhaps they, too, would find how hollow were their brave desires. They too, might come to drink of wormwood. I hoped they would.

"That was the state of mind I was in. I worked myself up into such a rage against God that my brain broke. . . .

"I came out of the hospital a Catholic, cured in soul, though still convalescent in body. I came out with a

certainly that grew upon me that there was a divine purpose in what had happened. I didn't know what the purpose was, and I do not know now. But I was sure that the adorable will of God had acted with the infinite goodness of God."

"Michael Donovan," Marjorie answered quickly, "used to say that you would have to drink deeply of sorrow before you came to joy. Either that way, or the way of becoming as simple as a child. Most people would rather choose suffering than simplicity. If they understood that the end was the same, they'd not choose so foolishly. Seldom is anyone wise enough to trust the paradox that gain arises out of loss—as Michael has trusted it."

"God," John replied, "is kind when He makes a man learn sense by knocking it into his fat head—as he knocked it into mine. Michael was quite right."

"About many things," she added emphatically.

"Of course I learned a good deal in Philadelphia. I obtained spiritual profit from the pawnbroking (though 'my uncle' took the material profit), just as I obtained spiritual profit on the cattle boat. But the great lesson I learned there was to wait quietly for God to speak. I stayed there until I received my orders!"

"Which were?" she asked.

"Oh, Marjorie, God only tells us one thing at a time. When we obey in that, He tells us what to do next."

"John," she said, with apparent irrelevance, "do you know the Catholic doctrine about vocation?"

"I suppose it means being obedient."

"Yes. A lot of good folk seem to suppose that it only means becoming a monk or a nun—and that narrows the meaning of a very great idea. Vocation is

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sometimes *doing*, sometimes *being*. In a few cases faithfulness to it demands renunciation. More often it merely implies acceptance."

Lines from the Slindon poem that had always stuck to his memory insinuated themselves into John's thoughts:

"A shelter from the driving rain  
Your high renouncement of desire;  
Food it shall be and wine and fire  
And peace shall enter once again,  
As quietly as dreams in sleep,  
The hidden trysting-place you keep."

This verse had haunted him. Renouncement was a shelter warm and grateful. He was prepared to believe it now, after his ambitions and desires had shriveled to dust.

Unknown to John, Marjorie also was repeating the poem to herself from which he had remembered a verse, a verse that he went over three or four times meditatively.

She broke the silence by asking, gravely, "What is your next step? What do you propose doing?"

John answered, "I couldn't have told you five minutes ago. My first step is to take a ticket for Slindon tomorrow. My last step, God only knows."

## CHAPTER IV

ONE comes upon the little Franciscan monastery at Slindon suddenly and with a cry of surprise. A gate and a Calvary mark the entrance, and far off the

gracious line of the church may be faintly discerned hiding among the cool woods as St. Francis hid himself on Mount Alvernia. Behind the monastery and the church is the Friars' Garden set with flowers, and with vegetables cunningly concealed by the line of pear trees. Here perhaps the visitor can most easily find the beauty and the peace which sink down into—and emanate from—the quiet souls of the monks.

The monastery gray and gothic is one of the few complete buildings of its kind in England. Hardly more than a miniature, but an exquisite miniature. Its history reads almost like one of the legends of the saints. When the order was dying in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the seven or eight old friars were on the point of giving up and of accepting permanently the status of the secular priest which had been theirs in practice for years, the Church at Slindon had been offered them. Here they had settled, putting on their habits again and making one last attempt at community life.

The monastery was not built in those days and the friars occupied a house near by where they practiced their rule in all its austerities. Few and aged as they were they came down from their home on the hill each midnight with lighted lanterns for the office of Matins. Their poverty was extreme. When the General of the Order came on a visitation he was offered a plate of cabbage stumps cooked in oil for his dinner.

"I can't eat this food!" he said sharply.

"We all eat it, sir," was the Guardian's answer.

The General, touched by the simplicity of the place and the sanctity so constant there, determined that the order should be kept alive in England. These were men, he felt, who, had they lived in the thirteenth in-

stead of the nineteenth century, would have been canonised. He saw to it that a friary should be built and the Franciscan spirit receive the possibility of expression.

Twenty years later, not only was Slindon flourishing, but there were two other houses of the order in the country. A group of young men had become friars and religious life had taken vigorous root once again.

The meek grace of Slindon was a tender inspiration to each man who had known it. The early rigors had indeed been mitigated by the wisdom of experience, but the essential peace remained. Here were the buried bones of the saints. In this refectory had they made their meager meal, in these cells knelt before the image of their crucified God.

Cardinal Newman, bowed with age, had preached in the pulpit of the Church. There is a story of how he came upon the death of one of his friends, a leader of the Oxford Movement who, upon becoming a Catholic, renounced an astonishingly brilliant career and "became a fool for Christ's sake," living as a Franciscan tertiary near the church where his son was a priest.

Newman entered while the community was at Vespers and knelt in one of the seats until one of the monks, seeing the great and venerable old man, took him into the choir and placed him in the guardian's stall. There the Cardinal knelt a minute, then suddenly buried his face in his hands and wept. . . . Many men afterwards kissed the wood which had once been wet with Newman's tears.

It was just over a year ago that Michael Donovan pushed open the gate opening on the road (opening for him to the cloister) and began to walk towards the Friary. His pipe was in his mouth, being smoked for

the last time. He cogitated on the question of taking it in with him as a relic of the past; but finally decided to throw it over the hedge. Then fearing that it might still contain a little unburnt tobacco—a sinful waste as it was his last smoke—he looked about until he managed to find a hole in the hedge and the pipe on the other side. It was still alight, though a moment exhausted it. But during that moment Michael smoked with fiendish joy. Then he stood up, flung the pipe as far away as he could, and continued his journey to the monastery door.

Four other young men, postulants for admission into the order, had already arrived. They were waiting for Michael before beginning their retreat. Ten days were spent in strict silence and meditation. At the end of that short period of probation they entered their novitiate.

On the same day that the five postulants had been clothed in the Franciscan habit, a litter of pigs arrived from the monastery sow, a circumstance which gave the Father Guardian the happy opportunity for a joke concerning the fifteen mysteries of the rosary. It was a very small joke, but it did a lot to help the neophytes through the difficult ceremony.

They entered into the chapter room that morning to find the community gathered there in readiness. Falling upon their faces as they had been directed, they were asked by the Superior, "*Quis queritis?*" Again as directed they answered, "*Misericordiam Dei et vestram.*" Then signaling to the postulants to rise, the Guardian addressed them as they stood in a row before him. It was in the course of his sensible, kindly little sermon—in which the Superior told the five men that though they were leaving the world and their fam-



ilies to undertake a supernatural work, yet they were being received into a relationship which was human, a new and a larger family, the Franciscan Order—that the little joke about the pigs was let off to cheer them up.

In turn the postulants knelt down before him and received the habit. Michael was the first. He took off his collar and tie, and his waistcoat, and then over him kneeling there was thrown the habit. His waist was girded with a cord, and he had become a Franciscan. When the other four postulants had been clothed in the same way, they were taken into the church and upon the altar steps were given their religious names.

“In the world,” said the Guardian, “you were known as Michael Donovan. Your name shall henceforth be Brother Gregory.”

The newly-made novices passed round the stalls, receiving from each friar the *pax*, the embrace of brotherhood. Michael laughed when Brother Stanislaus, a lay brother, wiped his stiff, untrimmed beard across his cheek, and again at the touch of Brother Gabriel’s three-days-old bristle. Nothing further remained now except the tonsure, and that was given in the afternoon.

More than small jokes would be needed to uphold these five young men in the hard country of the novitiate, though the first few weeks of monastic life were full of novelty. The dreary season of winter, of the year and of the soul, then set in. It had to pass before the flowers of Spring could grow and the grain slowly come to rounded fruition.

Taken singly, the details which made up the whole were not very dreadful. It was not easy of course to reply “*Deo gratias*” sincerely to the awakening knock on the door at five o’clock in the morning and the ex-

ordium "*Benedicamus Domino.*" Neither did the frugal food, the scrubbing of the cloisters, the silences, the long meditations, the meticulous regularity of the day, or abstinence from tobacco, come gratefully to body or spirit. It was inevitable that Brother Gregory, after his peculiarly free and Bohemian manner of life, should find the tiny but incessant restrictions of the religious rule well-nigh intolerable at times. It seemed such waste to do nothing except carefully to observe meaningless duties.

Yet along with all the irritation and impatience Michael was happy. The novices agreed that in order to know how to laugh it was necessary to be a Franciscan. Perhaps the reason is that even ordinary happenings strike the mind as irresistibly funny when seen against the background of the cloister. Certainly the days seemed crammed with laughable incidents and everything saturated with rich humor. There were deep comical meanings hidden in the manner of Brother Aloysius' walk, in the way Father Dennis flourished his spoon after a second helping of pudding, in the mere hang of Brother Joseph's habit, or in Brother Luke's original way of sweeping the corridor. Each member of the community was a spring of laughter to the novices.

Well they might enjoy it when Brother Stanislaus, a lay brother, an old man ending his days in a monastery after years in the R.I.C., wishing to spit into the quadrangle, with careful deliberation put his head through the window! That the breakage of glass did not cut his silvered head surely must have been due to his guardian angel!

Of the generous company of these five young men who had left the world together to give their names to re-

ligion, Brother Gregory was by far the eldest. Three were boys fresh from school; one, the nearest in age to Michael, was a tall, thin young Englishman, who had brought from Oxford an amazing enthusiasm for Franciscan poverty and an equally amazing appetite for food.

Although, on his own confession, he had "gone off" somewhat in his capacity for eating, what poor remnant of an appetite still remained in his possession was a source of astonishment to the rest of the community. Many of the brethren watched his plate, its wonderful loadings and its miraculous clearances, with far more interest than could be displayed in the worthy and wordy Eusebius, who was being read to them in the refectory.

The Novice Master was inclined to gentle jest on the subject—but jests would certainly have given way to heavy penances had he known of the secret visits to the kitchen; the stratagems for outwitting Brother Cook, the raids affected through the larder window, the spoils of ginger pudding and cake. Nor would he have been edified could he have heard the ecstatic panegyric on the subject of the novice's favorite dishes, upon which Brother Luke eloquently discoursed at all times and in all places to the others.

One of the maxims of Blossius (the "Mirror for Monks" was the accepted text book for the novices) was, "Let not the subject of eating and drinking be thought worthy of the conversation of religious." The fact was that very little else *could* be talked about in Brother Luke's company. A rational discussion was never started but a voice, speaking as from a mystic distance, broke in with, "Oh, I wish I had a jam tart!" Did one refer to the beauty of the garden and the

flowers; Brother Luke would remember cauliflowers—of which he was *particularly* fond. Was any mention made of the rock of Peter; an occult remark would be offered on the glorious delights of peppermint rock. They had to let him have his head and patiently listen.

“So few people know how to do crumpets. They should be prepared first with weak tea—let it soak right through, *then* spread the butter on—and you just put them in your mouth . . . and you feel sensations going all the way down, down, down . . . and I’ll tell you another thing—sweetbreads! I’m simply *desperately* keen on sweetbreads—and stewed peaches—oh! ooh! oooh!”

Let no reader think that all this was incompatible with the Franciscan spirit. By no means. Brother Luke gave new vigor to it, by referring to “Brother Bacon” and “Sister Sausage” in just the same way that his holy father St. Francis spoke of “Brother Fire” and “Sister Water.” Lest it should appear that such habits and conversation did not show a mortified character, it must be explained that Brother Luke expressly stated that it was all done in order to keep up his strength to enable him to practice austerities—a sophistry which his fellows thought hyper-scholastic in its subtlety!

Did the thought of rice and curry (of which he was very, very, *very* fond) distract him at his meditations? Then like an astute exponent of the mortified life, he would not attempt to meet temptation in frontal attack, but overcame it by thinking of degrees of other dainties, each a little less seductive than its predecessor. From rice and curry he would mount to rice pudding; then sternly leaving thoughts of rice pudding, ascend to baked potatoes; from baked potatoes he would reach

up to shortbread; after which the ascent would be easy to bread and butter and safety.

Brother Luke's resource was infinite. On one occasion, surprised by the novice master in the gooseberry bushes, with great presence of mind he seized a stick and began beating lustily about, shouting out, "A hare! Father, a hare!" A wry smile strove at the corner of the priest's mouth. "Yes, Brother, a hare is a very dangerous brute!"

He was nonplussed only once when his *inclinatio profunda* at the *Gloria* caused three pears to drop out from his habit and to roll to the Father Guardian's feet.

In chapter the accusations of the novices generally—Brother Luke's in particular—ended with ". . . and I've eaten fruit in the garden." A French novice of the past year, so it was said, not being able to speak English well, was accustomed to accuse himself in Latin. But the confession, before June was out, "*ambulans in horto poma manducavi*," elicited from the novice master a mild warning, "The brother had better not eat apples at this time of the year, otherwise he may get a natural penance in addition to the one I am about to impose."

Brother Luke, about whom so much that may appear irrelevant has been said, was an excellent illustration of monasticism. That is, he was a man of that type of (so to speak) extraordinary normality which the cloister so often attracts. He proved that men were not less human for wishing to become monks.

The rule was always the rule, but it was applied very gently in a knowledge of the infirmity of the flesh, especially to novices who were as yet babes in the spiritualities. A certain minimum was expected and indeed

exacted, but kindness softened the hard austerity of the cross. In a spirit of sweet reasonableness the Father Guardian used to say in Chapter that there were three questions he liked to ask novices: "Do you eat well? Do you sleep well? Do you pray well?" If the answer to the first two was "Yes," and to the last a doubtful "Not very well, father," he would smile and say, "Never mind. You have two signs of a good vocation. The third will come in time. A man has to learn how to pray in just the same way as a man has to learn how to paint!"

When the friars grew scrupulous over the distractions in choir that they experienced, the wise Superior knew how to comfort them. "Uh," he would grunt. "If a man doesn't have distractions—it's his own fault. If you have work to do, and do it, you're bound to have distractions—uh!"

Brother Gregory was not content to take things in this quiet way. As far as was possible without detection he tried to imitate the heroic austerities of the ancient saints. He could always, by refraining from altering the position of his body during meditation find a small but genuine mortification which no one would notice. And a rumpled bed successfully concealed the fact that he often slept upon the floor of his cell.

When in jocose mood he used to assure the other novices that the most dreadful penance he knew was to look steadily at a certain picture of St. Francis which hung over the mantelpiece in the Common Room. It was marked, very doubtfully, as having been painted by Guido Reni. If that were the case it had been spoiled by the engraver, who represented the saint, dressed in robes that flowed voluptuously over his body, kneeling awkwardly upon clouds about as solid as marble and

as uninteresting as lumps of fat. Meanwhile two drop-sical cherubs dangled palms above his aureole.

Brother Gregory's literary sense, too, received tortures from many of the books chosen to be read aloud during meals. The rest of the community took a book sensibly. If it seemed interesting they attended; if it proved dull there was no compulsion to listen. One could think of something else. Not so with Michael. He was intent and agonized through all the wretched weeks while the "Ecclesiastical History" of Eusebius was being droned out. The book was shapeless enough in the original, but in a villainous translation it was unendurable. When it came to Michael's turn to read, he used to descend from the pulpit at the conclusion of supper with nerves set on edge by the barbarous English.

Not a few vocations have been destroyed by the literary style of the pious volumes of the type most frequently chosen to be read aloud in monastic refectories. But the vast majority of monks at Slindon, as elsewhere, never troubled their heads about the things that Michael Donovan found so distressing. They took dull books for granted. They went to bed as early as possible and got up at the last minute. They enjoyed their meals. They made themselves as comfortable as their stalls allowed when they were in choir. It would have been better for Brother Gregory had he been able to do likewise. But he was fiercely intolerant of compromise and was provoked by what he thought the slack, easy-going methods adopted by some members of the community.

Superiors prefer to see cheerfulness and obedience among their subjects than extravagant austerity. The reason is that the body is a delicate instrument and

one that should be discreetly used, if it is not to break down. Experienced, thoroughly trained monks may practice mortifications with advantage that would be entirely injudicious if practiced by novices. Michael was in too much of a hurry. He tried to jump five-barred gates before he had learned to walk. His failure was a great disappointment.

The renunciation of affection was not nearly so difficult as he had imagined. Gracious memories of Marjorie were frequently in his mind—though they came less into it as the months passed by—but the presence of other men about him, wearing the same habit and tonsure, observing the same rule, under the same vows that he would take in his turn, all became so many props to his soul. There was a collective strength in the monastery, sometimes a unity of purpose that appeared to possess a personality. Unseen hands held him, an invisible ally was at his side.

The really trying thing was the monotonous inactivity of the novitiate. The priests had some definite work to do, some variety in their lives; but for the novice each day was exactly like the day that had preceded it. There were the choir offices binding upon everyone, an important if wearisome duty. But the largest number of waking hours seemed to be wasted on trivial things—a little manual work, a little study, a little recreation—a little of all sorts of odds and ends and nothing of anything definite.

Inactivity was the great trial of his novitiate. Michael Donovan had lived a full and rich life in the world. Brother Gregory was living a trivial life in the cloister. Ordination was seven years away; that is, he would be forty before he became a priest and had something to do. Seven years pottering about lay before



him. Of course there would be studies beginning at the end of the term of novitiate—but the young monk could not believe that it would take six years for him to complete his philosophical and theological courses. The seven years were an obsession. They would drive him to imbecility.

In the night, after the others had gone to bed, Brother Gregory was in the habit of stealing softly in felt slippers along the corridor to the little oratory at its end. There, kneeling in the darkness, lit only by the fitful twinkle of the tiny sanctuary lamp, he would pray for grace to endure to the end in his vocation. Sometimes it seemed as if his Lord reached out from the enclosing tabernacle to wrap him in a peace and joy so great that the worshiper felt that he must die of love. Then his heart became a burning coal in his breast. But such experiences were rare. Far more frequently blank desolation descended upon him and he felt sick with frustration. He told himself that feelings are not a matter of importance, that God might be with him all unperceived, drawing, drawing his soul. Yet it was cold comfort, and when at last he said farewell to the Presence, kissed the floor, and went back to his dark cell, it was often with a heart weary and faint with unsatisfied desire.

Michael had renounced his earthly ambitions; he had set his will to a keener edge; he had played the man as well as the monk, he had paid the price—and his reward was desolation. Hardness had been expected, but not this utter loneliness, empty of the face of God.

One night—one that followed a long chafing day when inactivity had been especially trying—a sky full of stars was spread outside his window. Chilly as his cell was he stood looking at them—and as he looked

they faded from his eyes. He was walking now in a Kentish orchard. The deep grass came up to his ankles as he passed through it, crushing wild flowers at every step. Overhead the pink and white blossoms of cherry trees shook down a few light flaky petals in the wind, and they fell upon his coat. The sun glittered upon a hedge pricked out with dog-roses, upon the orchard trees, upon the hills beyond. . . .

Then Michael came to himself, remembering with a pang where he was and that he had cast aside the loveliness of the lovely world . . . The poem sent to John Bradley was already written. But it was completely forgotten in Michael's unquenchable thirst for a material beauty whose loss was the chief part of his renunciation.

## CHAPTER V

JOHN expected that Brother Gregory would meet him at Arundel, and he was looking forward with some pleasure mixed with a little embarrassment to see the brown Franciscan habit and white cord that would, he thought, clothe his friend. A Michael Donovan very little changed from the form of his old friend was awaiting him upon the platform of the railway station; there was no monastic garb, there were no sandals, but instead a familiar blue serge suit and gray soft felt hat. John jumped out eagerly, and the two men gripped each other's hands.

"But don't you wear a habit?" began John.

"Oh, yes, but we never wear it except in the grounds of the monastery or within a mile or two round. We

always change when we come into Arundel. And until profession we are not allowed to wear clerical dress."

Michael insisted upon taking John's bag, and—having gained his point—led him along the road that led to the monastery.

On the walk to Slindon, John Bradley told the history of his American experiences, or of that part of the history which concerned his conversion to Catholicism and of his voyage on the cattle-boat. He had hardly ended when the cool, leafy entrance into the monastery park was passed. Then Michael interrupted his talk. "We will go over everything in my cell this afternoon. See, there is our potato field. We novices have done all that. Did you ever plant potatoes, Bradley! One learns wisdom at that work!"

They went up the long winding avenue and at last stood in the little porch. John was expecting in a vague way to see a moat and drawbridge, or at least ponderous gates of iron barring the entrance. Instead a plain unlocked door, which when pushed open showed a small hall containing only a table bearing a few copies of the Franciscan Tertiary Magazine and a half-full-sized statue of Our Lady. At its foot was written, *Behold Thy Mother*. Michael pushed open another door, and they passed into the cloister.

Slindon was a small friary, but one admirably proportioned. As such things go it was a fine example of modern Gothic architecture, one of the best works of Pugin. The cloisters were cool and clean, and lit on the quadrangle side by high-pointed windows. The walls were hung with a few religious engravings and many photographs of various Franciscan communities. At the end nearest the entrance stood a huge carved wood crucifix reaching almost to the roof. Brother

Gregory led Bradley up some stairs and into a cell which was to be his during his visit.

"I'm glad they've given you water. You might like to wash while I go into the novitiate and put on my habit. I shall only be a few minutes."

Ten minutes later a knock came upon John's door and Michael re-entered—this time as Brother Gregory, in the full religious dress—and took his friend downstairs into the refectory.

The community had already finished their dinner, so John and Brother Gregory ate their meal alone.

Dinner eaten, there were introductions to be gone through; to the Guardian, a middle-aged, highly-strung, intensely energetic priest, a strict but brilliant ruler of the community, famous in the world for his preaching and famous in the cloister for his harmless eccentricity and his flashes of inspired sagacity.

Then came the novice-master, Father Aldhelm, an old gentle-mannered friar, much beloved by his novices. All who passed through his hands bore his mark afterwards. Of great holiness of life, and a scrupulous strictness with himself, he drew the souls of the young to spiritual generosity by means of exquisite tact and understanding. With them, his rule was so tempered with gentleness and a whimsical humor that he hardly appeared to rule—obedience was spontaneous.

"Brother Gregory," said the novice master, "perhaps Mr. Bradley might like to join the novices in their recreation."

John said that he would very much like to do so.

"Oh, but I had forgotten," Father Aldhelm continued, "in ten minutes or so the bell will ring for Vespers, so you had better wait until this evening. Of course you can be dispensed from choir for the rest of the

day, Brother, so you will have time to show your friend round."

The monastery—or to use the more correct word, the friary—at Slindon was small, and filled almost to its limit by the community of seventeen then occupying it. These were made up of eight priests, five lay brothers, and the four novices. There had been five at the beginning of Brother Gregory's year, but one novice had left the order after trying his vocation for three months.

Situated, as it was, under the Sussex hills and by the valley of the Arun, and far enough from London to be free from the tyranny of towns and interruption of townsmen, it made an ideal nursery for monks. A larger monastery would have seemed chill and empty with so small a community, a smaller one difficult for the proper ordering of the day, and the fit observance of the rule. Slindon was snug and had much of the family feeling which is necessary to the success of religious life.

Michael soon had shown John all that there was to be seen in the house itself; the chapter room, covered with mural paintings of the saints and the blessed of the order—a large, square room, quite empty of furniture except for the bench which ran round the four walls. The refectory, very clean and austere in a friendly way, with bare unclothed oak tables set ready for meals, the Guardian's bell over his seat and the reading desk by the opposite wall. Upon the side walls hung Piranesi's Roman engravings. A long, narrow, high-roofed room, where one instinctively spoke in a whisper as in church, but one full of cheerful smells of savory meats (sometimes of dirty washing-up water) and the happy anticipation of the art of the cook.

From there they went into the Common Room, bright and big, a heavy table in the center and a grand piano in the corner, a statue of St. Francis upon the carved stone mantelpiece, and copies of the *Tablet* and the *Dublin Review* and the *Daily Telegraph* thrown upon the plain wooden armchairs with which it was furnished. Not often was it used, twice a day for half-an-hour's recreation after dinner and after supper, when a semi-circle would be formed in summer as in winter about the fireplace, and easy, pleasant talk go on until the ringing of the bell summoning to more office.

Michael was not allowed to take John into his own cell, for that was in the novitiate, a part of the house locked against the rest of the community and into which not even the Father Guardian could enter without the permission of its Master. But John could see what a monk's cell was from the one he occupied himself.

It was a bright little room, with none of the small barred windows and the gloom associated with the word "cell." A small iron bedstead was in one corner, a plain enamel wash-basin upon a ledge in another; the other furnishings were a towel horse, a table, a chair, a bookcase and chest of drawers. There were no carpets upon the floors, and the white walls contained only a crucifix and a colored print of St. Francis receiving the stigmata.

Poverty? Yes, but dignified and kindly poverty, relieving rather than oppressing the spirit. Here one could read and write and meditate and pray, and give to one's abode domesticity and the impress of personality. No two cells were quite alike; poverty was equal but unstereotyped. Nothing was standardized, the furniture differed in every room, but in every room it was lowly and sufficient. The Father Guardian's apart-

ment did not differ substantially from that of any of the lay brothers—it contained a few more books, a typewriter and a basket chair; that was all.

During the afternoon Brother Gregory showed John Bradley round—there was a good deal to be seen—the garden, where flowers grew for the altar and fruit and vegetables for the refectory, and in which the novices were taking their afternoon walk, singly and in silence; the little museum, dusty and dirty but full of treasures. John lingered longest here, poring over several illuminated missals written by friars, centuries dead, in the florid later-medieval style. And Brother Gregory produced from a glass case a white skull cap that had been worn by Benedict XII., which he irreverently placed on John's head.

They had not exhausted the museum when the bell clanged for supper—a mysterious meal unlike any that John had eaten in his life. As they came out they found Father Aldhelm waiting for them.

“Brother Gregory, perhaps Mr. Bradley would like to join the novices in their recreation. You'll take him along to the garden, will you, and introduce him.”

Michael conducted John up the steep garden path, at the summit of which a small knot of brown habited figures stood near a summer-house. In the center was a tall, abnormally thin young man, small of head and long of body—the body, as John soon learned, justified itself, and the head contained more than its size would suggest—who was speaking with enthusiasm. The high, clear, ringing voice carried: “A whole dish, man! A whole dish!”

“A whole dish of what?” asked Michael, as he came up to them. The thin friar was covered with his own peculiar form of comical embarrassment. But he

quickly recovered himself and went on to explain that at dinner, after having waited upon the community, he had found at the second table a whole dish of prunes—treasure! They had gone the way of so many other dishes, not only of prunes, but of turkeys, apple-tarts, mince-pies, cakes, biscuits, fruit, jellies—it is idle, not to say impossible, to enumerate all the dainties which had found their way, according to his fellow novices, into his mysterious interior during his short but exceedingly convivial life.

John joined in the general laugh; it was a big relief somehow to find that the young monks were still school-boys. He was introduced to the other novices—to Brothers Silvester, Jerome and Joseph, pleasant fresh-complexioned youths of eighteen or nineteen. The fourth novice, he who was the center of the group, the eater of the whole dish of prunes, was presented to John under the name of Brother Luke.

As they walked up and down the long garden paths a matter of great moment was discussed—the sermon that Brother Luke had to preach at supper the following night. It was known that the text must have already been chosen and the theme elaborated; for though the sermons could not be read they had to be written out, in substance at least, beforehand and submitted to the novice master for censoring. It would not be seemly to have budding friars teaching heresy, though unwittingly, and only in the refectory where unconscious heterodoxy could do no harm. Brother Luke refused to disclose his subject. The general opinion was the text should be, "Whose god is his belly." So much only Brother Luke admitted that his illustrations and metaphors were local and apt for the occasion. Should there be fish for supper, then there would be



fish similes to point his discourse. Were beans upon the menu then, as he put it, he would "give them beans."

After the ringing of the bell for Compline, which cut short Brother Luke's eloquence and the badinage of his companions, John had no further opportunity for talk with Brother Gregory, who was occupied with his monastic duties, until the afternoon of the next day. Then Michael, during a stroll with John in the park which he had been permitted to take by his novice-master, told the story of how Brother Luke became a Franciscan.

Before coming to the Order, Sir Anthony Masters, Brother Luke's grandfather, the first baronet, had acquired a large fortune in the East India trade, and, having purchased his title as a consideration for his lavish contribution to the Liberal Party funds, died. Brother Luke's own father, the second of the line, died when his son was only four years old, and the uncle who became under his will the little boy's guardian was received into the Catholic Church shortly afterwards and had his nephew baptized and brought up in the Faith. From the time he was fourteen Sir Anthony Masters had possessed a longing for the cloister, especially for the poverty of the cloister.

This fact was of the utmost significance. As in the case of most rich men, the very goodness prevalent in his home was founded in riches; wealth was a safeguard against sin. He could obtain what he wanted without unlawful snatching. His uncle was an exceedingly pious man, careful in his religious duties, just, benevolent, temperate, and charitable. Like the rich man of the parable, he had kept the commandments, but he lacked one thing: he had not sold all and given to the poor. He had the goodness of riches, not the perfection of

poverty. Protected from gross evil by his wealth, there was no opportunity for his virtue to grow into heroism. And the powerful charm of this gracious opulence was used from the first to mold the soul of his nephew. He was sent to Downside, where he mixed not with the poor, but with rich boys and well-connected monks. Yet even there he formed, unaided except by grace, his ideal of poverty.

His uncle destined him for the Bar, and a political career. The nephew chose the Lady Poverty of St. Francis. Most religious vocations, especially among "born" Catholics, are formed and stimulated by external influence. Candidates for the cloister are educated for the cloister; rarely do they choose it without this outside impulse. But the young Sir Anthony was clear and definite about his vocation. When he spoke of it to his uncle he intensely shocked that admirable man. Goodness he understood, not perfection. But being sensible and optimistic he determined not to oppose the wish of his nephew at present. It could not be made effectual for some years and probably was only a boyish enthusiasm which would pass. He even affected to acquiesce in the project, because he was certain that time and the kindly influences of his social surroundings would do all that was needed. At the age of eighteen Sir Anthony went up to Oxford, leaving behind him at Downside a record for the hundred yards, and a tradition which promised to have the vitality of a legend concerning his capacity for eating rice pudding.

The *viva voce*, presided over by Professor Squirrell, the famous originator of "Squirrellisms," was an event in the lives of the dons present at it. One of his examiners inquired Sir Anthony's favorite authors. They were Kipling, Conan Doyle, and Robert Hugh Benson.

The conjunction of these names seemed to amuse the board. There was a titter of laughter. Then Professor Squirrell asked the name of one of Monsignor Benson's books. "Come Rack, Come Rope," replied the candidate.

The inventor of "Squirrellisms" sneered as he said "Yes, I suppose he would call his books by names of that sort." Then he put another question:

"What do you propose to be in life?"

Without a moment's hesitation came the answer, "A monk!"

The eyes of the don glittered with excitement. This was a new kind of Oxford man. He wore the ordinary clothes and had the public school voice. Typical he was in many ways, clean-cut, well-bred, and evidently well off; the bearer of a famous name, and the possessor of crude literary enthusiasms! But a monk! They passed him—what else could they do?

Sir Anthony Master's university career was not remarkably distinguished for scholarship. But he did well upon the cinder track, twice representing his college at sports. At the Union he shone in an erratic, fitful way as a debater. His chief fame lay in his possession of an unassuageable appetite (which hampered but did not altogether destroy his athletic prowess) and in the amazing rhetoric he could display in pronouncing panegyrics on culinary art.

Everybody knew of his monastic ambitions, but nobody treated them seriously. They were looked upon as only another instance of his madcap eccentricities. He took his pass degree and left the university. A few weeks later paragraphs in the paper announced to a startled world and a wondering Oxford that Sir An-

thony Masters had entered the Franciscan novitiate at Slindon.

This story made John Bradley eager to hear the sermon that Brother Luke was to deliver that evening. The giving up of so much wealth and so splendid a worldly position proved him to possess a remarkable character. And John had already discovered amid the grave nonsense of his conversation an indication of the novice's remarkable talents.

The great hour arrived, the supper bell rang and the community assembled in the refectory. Grace at an end, the brethren took their places, and pulled their cowls over their heads. The servers began to walk the length of the tables with the dishes of food, and a tea-urn was carried from place to place—all in silence.

At meals it was customary for a brother to ascend the pulpit and sing a few verses in Latin from the gospels and read a chapter from some other part of the Bible. Then would follow, for the rest of the meal, reading from a book chosen for instruction and spiritual profit. For months the "Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius" had been read aloud. At the best of times it was a penance to follow the wanderings of the good chronicler, but in the barbarous translation the work became a weariness to the flesh. At last, after three months of Eusebius, the desperate novices had determined to skip. A momentous decision! Eighty pages were turned over. The Father Guardian did not notice the jump (perhaps he too was aching for the conclusion of the book) and other jumps followed. It had taken three months to read the first half of the book; a week sufficed for the second. The whole community sighed with relief when the chaotic narrative came to a close.

There was something very soothing in the silence of these monastic meals. The friars sat at the uncovered oak tables eating their plain fare, cowed and recollected, and hardly less religious in their demeanor than when in church. And rightly; for, as Brother Luke argued, eating was an exceedingly important matter, not to be undertaken frivolously. St. Francis said that we should not neglect the proper care of our brother, the body!

This half-hour, however, was the time set for Brother Luke's sermon. As soon as the brethren had seated themselves the preacher came into the refectory and, kneeling before the Guardian, asked his blessing. That given, he ascended the pulpit.

It is something of an ordeal to preach in a large room to fifteen men who have come there to eat—not to listen. Many a man who has distinguished himself by impetuous eloquence in after years has failed in the refectory. One must not preach *at* the community, but *before* it to a congregation that does not exist. The note of conviction is accordingly hard to catch. Many stories are told of novitiate sermons. One is of a young and ambitious novice who, having ascended the pulpit, began with torrential passion: "Darken the sun! Extinguish the moon! Veil the stars!" only to be cut short by the quiet voice of the Superior adding, "Turn off the gas!"

Brother Luke, if he felt any trepidation, certainly did not show it. He went up swiftly and began at once: "‘Feed the hungry.’ In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

There were splutterings of suppressed laughter, for the gargantuan appetite of the novice was known not only among his fellows, but to the rest of the com-

munity, and in fact to the entire English Province of the Friars Minor. A lay-brother, choking at the jest, went hastily out of the room with a dish of potatoes he had been about to carry in. Brother Gregory grew red in the face and his veins swelled ominously, but he controlled himself. The other novices exploded into their serviettes. Even the Father Guardian made a wry contortion with his lips.

"This, my dear brethren, is the first corporal work of mercy. There are other works of mercy, all admirable in their way, but this we may almost say is not only the first of them, but their foundation. Rightly does the Church set it at the head of her list. One *should* visit the sick. But how much better to make the visit practical and beautiful by a present of delicious grapes! Care for prisoners? Yes. But the most effective way to brighten their cells and to ease their chains is to take them a hamper containing, let us say, a roast chicken, a jelly, and a cake! Clothe the naked? Certainly. But what use is there in clothing the skin unless you also clothe the stomach? Men have been known to live without clothes—men still do live without clothes in many parts of the world—but men have never been known to live quite without food. If you fail to give food, all your other charities are made ineffective and useless!"

The preacher warmed to his subject. He told of how lacking proper nourishment men grew up with stunted bodies; of how insufficiently fed children became not only starved in body but pinched in mind; of how food was even necessary to the spiritual man—without it the soul is weighted down by the body and droops. "Why, monks," he cried, "are traditionally plump! How could they sustain the rigors of the religious life

unless they kept up sufficient strength of body by good meals?"

Brother Luke went on to speak of the poor. "How can they believe in a religion which fails to practice this most important precept? How can they worship God when all their thoughts must be pre-occupied with wonderings where their next meal is to come from? Abolish hunger and you largely minimize theft. Feed the people properly, and their moral nature will acquire a balance and a freedom they too often and inevitably lack. This may sound materialistic. It is sound sense and sound theology. We are not disembodied spirits; the body is as much a part of a man as his soul. Neither should be neglected."

The community were evidently stirred. A mild interest as to how a novice would shape was usually the deepest emotion that occupied a refectory congregation. For the rest they dealt with their fish and potatoes. But on this occasion they heard a sermon of a new sort. Brother Luke was a wag, and they recognized and allowed for his fun; but at the bottom of all the buffoonery lay genuine feeling and force. Never before had they heard a sermon like this in the refectory. The Father Guardian was so lost in attention that he forgot to eat his supper that night, a fact that was equally complimentary and damning to the preacher's eloquence. He was so absorbed by the preaching that he omitted to practice what was preached.

Brother Luke touched a high note in conclusion. "Our Blessed Lord is spoken of under many symbols. He is the Lamb of God; the Light of the world; the Way, the Truth, and the Life. But most constantly He is the Food of the soul. The Word Who became flesh has also become living bread—our daily and super-sub-

stantial bread! And as the body will die without food, so the soul will die unless it eat of His flesh and drink of His blood. God also executes works of mercy which may be called corporal. He visits the sick; He clothes the man naked in his sins with Mercy; and has in His goodness a glorious work which may be said to be the foundation of *His* corporal works, even as we have one which is the foundation of those which *we* are bound to perform—He feeds the hungry!

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost . . .” Brother Luke blessed himself and descended from the pulpit.

## CHAPTER VI

**F**OR over a fortnight John stayed at Slindon, observing everything quietly, intensely fascinated by everything he observed. It could not be wondered at if he, a man to whom Catholicism was still strange and unfamiliar, should obtain very superficial impressions from what he saw about him during a brief visit, for one does not begin to touch the heart of monasticism until the unfamiliarity of its setting changes into intimacy, until the strangeness wears off. But John was absorbed in the life around him, and grew acquainted with its face, if not its soul.

Each morning at seven a lay brother called him, in time for the mass half-an-hour later. At this he communicated each morning—though in Philadelphia he had exhibited the recent convert’s reluctance to frequent communion—and got to the refectory for breakfast by half-past eight. Here ham and eggs—a con-



cession to a visitor—awaited him; and after that a day spent in whatever manner he chose. He had the run of the house and explored it thoroughly. His table was littered with books from the library (he read everything he could find on the Franciscan idea); and his chest of drawers was piled with a score of pears that a lay brother had pressed upon him in the garden. He had the freedom if not the ease that is associated with “being at home.”

He had been received with the most charming hospitality, and when once, at the close of the first week of his visit, he had announced his intention of going away, the Father Guardian asked, “Is it anything urgent that calls you?” And when John admitted that there was no urgency the Guardian pressed him so kindly to remain until after the novices had taken their religious vows, that there was nothing to do but to consent.

So John had been there another week, devouring the *Fioretti*, ransacking the rich but untidy library, assisting with unfailing delight in the singing of the Divine Office (he was even allowed to go into choir for Matins with the monks), and mining in Michael Donovan’s stores of knowledge of Franciscan history.

About himself John Bradley had thought very little. He had arrived at Slindon in a mood of expectant quietness; he had now reached a state when his quietness was not even expectant. The external usages of monastic life produced upon him a certain mental excitement; but as his mental excitement increased the sense of spiritual strain decreased. He had not noticed it, which fact was perhaps the stronger proof of the healthiness of his mood.

Then suddenly a questioning season returned to him. He had almost forgotten why he had come. He had not spoken to Michael as he had intended to speak, though he could not go away without doing so. All that he had learned was that a monastery was an interesting institution, that it was inhabited by pleasant people—but that was hardly what he had come to learn.

So thought John, within himself, as he walked up and down the garden paths upon the morning following the refectory sermon.

He couldn't very well stay at Slindon much longer. In a very few days the novices would be professed; after that, he must go away. Moreover, Brother Gregory, like all the other novices, would be going, immediately that he had taken his vows, to the study-house of the Order in London. There could, therefore, be no further excuse for prolonging the visit.

John walked up and down the walks of the high garden, passing every now and then one of the novices who, silent and solitary, were taking their half-hour's morning constitutional. Every time he passed one of the young friars the hood over the Franciscan's head would be slightly lifted in salutation; but no word was spoken.

Life here was full of little courtesies, many of them quite peculiar to religion. Slight ceremonial gestures were constantly being made—thanks were given, or pardon or permission asked by means of a silent ritual that was exceedingly charming.

Brother Luke, gazing up into the trees trying to discover any apples that might be ungathered, passed John. He caught sight of one upon a high branch, and, jumping up, managed to bring it within his reach.

Then he winked—a ceremonial gesture that was silent indeed, but more amusing than charming. But he also lifted his cowl in salutation.

Soon a bell clanged at the gate. The novices left the garden at that signal. John had it now to himself.

He went slowly and carefully over his past, sitting in a canvas chair in the arbor, with his hands crossed behind his head, thinking deeply. The idea that he might have a vocation to the monastic state had never occurred to him before. Now he was so staggered with it that he tried to steady himself with thought. There was nothing, so far as he could see, to prevent his becoming a monk if the community was willing to receive him. . . .

God had made him learn the profound lessons of loss and pain. It was now a matter of calm assurance in his mind that his loss, that his pain, were part of a beneficent design. It was not so certain that the monastic design was the one intended, but nothing appeared to conflict with the suggestion that had taken possession of him that he should be a monk. After all, desire, death and dereliction might have been intended to bring him to this. The Valley of the Shadow might have been a novitiate for a novitiate.

John was attracted by the life, and frankly acknowledged its attraction to himself. Moreover, in the Order he would have the companionship of Michael, and John loved and admired Michael more than any other man. He had no ties in the world to hold him back. It was really a very uncomplicated affair.

Then a doubt struck him. He was not so foolish as to imagine that a religious life was without hardships. The physical hardships, of course, were obvious; but there was a spiritual discipline to be endured, a con-

tinuous testing of character. Nevertheless, there were to him undeniable attractions in the Franciscan life as he had seen it, as he had read of it. There might be more of inclination than vocation in his case. He put the subtle doubt aside. He did not throttle it, but he would not allow it to overwhelm him. God had cut him free from all his entanglements with the world, though the cutting of that web of implication had hurt him like the snapping of his nerves. But pain was now succeeded by peace. He wished sincerely to discover the will of God, to obey that will. There could never be a more fortunate opportunity than the present.

John's contemplations were interrupted by a shadow falling across the door of the arbor in which he sat. He turned his head to see who was approaching. It was Brother Gregory.

"They told me you were here," said the novice. "I wanted to talk to you."

"What's up?" enquired John. "You weren't out with the others a little while ago, were you?"

"No," Michael answered briefly, "I've been with the Novice Master and the Guardian." He stopped short, then went on again. "Shall we talk here—or don't you think it would be better to go into the park. We have less chance of being disturbed there."

"I don't mind—well, let's go into the park," said John, glancing keenly at Brother Gregory's face, upon which lay a shade of trouble.

John stood up to go with his friend, and looking at him once again saw nothing unusual in his expression. Perhaps that troubled look was a figment of his own imagination. Brother Gregory began instantly to talk in his usual easy manner.

"You haven't had the chance, I suppose, Bradley,"

he said, "of speaking to the lay brothers. One or two of them are most extraordinary characters; so for the matter of that are some of the priests. There's no individualism like that of the cloister. It doesn't do to encourage personal idiosyncrasy in the world; consequently many an engaging eccentric is spoiled by repression. Here—though they are not exactly encouraged—they are not suppressed."

John replied to the effect that he had seen and appreciated a good deal of that eccentricity. "Moreover," he added, "even if it had escaped me, the constant ragging in the Fathers' Common Room would have made it apparent. Everybody has his pet peculiarity mimicked and his leg pulled."

"A Religious Order," Michael went on, "is rather more, though, than a collection of cranks, however many cranks it may contain. You see that old lay brother over there who has just come in with the wheelbarrow. He is a saint whose feet I would feel honored to kiss. I did kiss them once, as a chapter penance, and it is one of my proudest recollections. The most wonderful tales are told of some of these ignorant old fellows. One story I can tell, of an incident that happened during my year.

"There was an old, old lay brother, Brother Stanislaus, we had. He used to be in the R.I.C., and I suppose as reparation for having been a policeman in Ireland he joined the Order when he was forty-eight. He lived the life of a lay brother thirty-six years, dying four months ago. In his last illness he had to be taken to the hospital at Arundel. He asked Brother Simon, another of our lay brothers, if he would mind looking after his room while he was away. In it he had been in the habit of keeping a twenty-four-hour lamp burning

before the little statue of our Lady. Simon promised to do what was asked and went in for the first day or two to replenish the lamp and to keep the place clean. Then he forgot it for a week. At the end of that a message came from the hospital to say that old Stanislaus was much worse. That reminded Simon that he had forgotten his promise. He went up and unlocked the door. *The lamp was still burning, John!* While he stood there he heard a moan in the room. Then suddenly the flame from the lamp shot up high and expired. Simon learned afterwards that at that moment Stanislaus died in the hospital!"

Michael let the tale make its effect before drawing its moral. "These old men have an amazing grasp of the supernatural. They are nearly all Irishmen; you don't often get Englishmen ready to endure the hardness and the obscurity of a lay brother's vocation. Priests are able to get out to preach. At any rate they have variety in their work and a status, also the possibility of ecclesiastical promotion—but these wonderful lay brothers have nothing except hard manual work and the love of God."

Michael walked on after this in silence for a few minutes. Then he began again. "Do you know, John, I got a shock after I had lived here for three or four months."

"How do you mean?" said John, uncomfortably disconcerted.

"Well, I came to think the people here were inclined to be lax."

John did not answer. It was not a theme he could discuss.

"Well, towards the close of the year I came to revise my opinion of the community. I had always loved

the brethren; now I admire them. My early superficial view of their laxity is completely discarded.

"A spectacular sanctity had been expected, an ethereal unearthly holiness. These were not to be found. A number of decent, genial fellows who made no pretense to terrific piety, who ate hearty meals in refectory, came late to choir and gave a very moderately punctilious observance to the rule, took the place of the emaciated ascetics whom I had expected. But as I came to know them better I discovered that despite their comfortable exterior demeanor many of them were living mortified and heroic lives; that a man might be a saint even if he regularly took a second helping at dinner; that a jolly manner was often the cloak of a secret austerity.

"The purpose of monasticism also came to be more accurately understood by me. Publicly it means the acceptance of reasonable minimum of discipline; what is done in the way of penance should be kept strictly private. The left hand is not to know the good deeds of the right hand. Once or twice, by accident, I have discovered friars, whom I had imagined to be among the most lax of the community, sacrificing themselves in a way that made me ashamed of my previous uncharitable thoughts. They were as confused at being convicted of virtue as ordinary men are confused when they are convicted of vice.

"An acid test can always be brought to bear upon the cloister. Are the monks industrious? If they are, it is well with them. The religious ought to be the most laborious life in the world. Speaking generally, it is the most laborious. But it offers more opportunity than any other for a self-indulgent laziness. The duties exacted by the rule occupy at the most four or five

hours' work a day and the remaining time is disposed largely according to the individual monk's conscience and discretion. Superiors cannot, even if they would, be perpetually inquiring into the diligence of their subjects. The result is that sloth is the besetting sin of the cell—the sin that offers the most constant temptation, the sin that is the first step towards demoralization.

“And yet sloth is rarely found in monasteries—in many respects that may be taken as the most remarkable fact about them. There is no sloth at the Franciscan Friary of Slindon. Some few of its members possess a feverish energy; all of its members are busy in varying degrees. The majority are, of course, constitutionally incapable of the unceasing activity of the Guardian, whose typewriter can be heard clicking away from nine o'clock every morning till nine o'clock every evening, except when the Guardian is reading or engaged in the choir or refectory, or enjoying his recreation of fishing. But the majority work steadily, though they cannot, and cannot be expected, to stand the Guardian's pace.”

The two men walked out into the park, part of the monastery grounds. Past the tennis court they went and the swimming pool, among the dim and tangled woods. Then Brother Gregory suddenly stopped. “I don't suppose that you think that all that was what I wanted to tell you,” he said.

“No,” John answered. “Then what is the trouble, Michael?”

“Let us sit down on the trunk of that fallen tree—I want to talk to you seriously.” He pulled out a pipe and pouch of tobacco, somewhat to his companion's surprise, who knew of the rule against smoking. “I'm



allowed to smoke now," he said, filling and lighting up. "The fact is I'm leaving here, so I can do pretty much as I like."

John drew steadily at his own pipe before replying. He did not think for the moment how Michael's decision was likely to affect himself, but he was simply and sincerely astonished at the breakdown of a vocation which he considered secure. Then he said, "Well, that's the last thing I ever expected to hear. What made you want to leave?"

"It's a long, queer story, and I do not think I could tell it properly or that you would altogether understand it if I could," Michael began, "I have had the time of my life in many ways—you have seen the Guardian and the novice master, well, they've been very patient with me and have let me try the thing right out. After six months of my life here they told me that they thought I had no vocation to be a friar, or even a secular priest for the matter of that. I insisted that I had a vocation. They let me stay on, telling me to pray very much for guidance, and that Almighty God would direct me and give me His grace.

"The professions come off in three days. I have just been to see the novice master and told him that I believed he was right about me. I dare not tell you what he said. But I will tell you what the gist was of the Guardian's remarks when I saw him a little while before. 'My dear brother,' he said, 'you know our doctrine of vocation, that there is no soul born into this world that has not some job given it by God, by the doing of which alone can happiness be obtained in this life and blessedness made secure for the life to come. To most men no direct call is necessary. What appears to be the luck of circumstances, but what is really Providence,

gives them their station in life. They become bricklayers or bankers or lawyers or dustmen by no conscious choice on their part. But if, realizing that God has ordained their lives for them in His mercy and love, they try to fulfill the duties which are forced upon them in an honest and zealous way; if they offer up their work to God and obey His commandments, they are truly following their vocations as surely and indeed as mystically as the most sublime contemplative could do.

“Here and there God calls a man or woman to some special work, in the cloister or out of it. To such He gives the gifts and the graces which mark them for their work and sustain them in the doing of it.

“Though the religious state is the highest to which any man can aspire, it will certainly be the means of damnation to him who knowingly thrusts himself into it without that vocation. He, on the other hand, who deliberately rejects his vocation, will suffer shipwreck. That sounds a terrible doctrine perhaps. In practice it is not. God will make it clear to the devout soul, and give His grace to the humble. It is possible for a good man to make mistakes in the matter, but God is infinitely just and infinitely kind. So that St. Thomas Aquinas teaches us that he who takes his vows, having no vocation, but in good faith, obtains a vocation upon profession from Almighty God; and that even he who, having taken his vows from a bad motive, afterwards repents, is pardoned by God and given a vocation and the grace to be obedient in it.

“Now I do not think that you are called to be a monk. We have watched you carefully and have found that you lack not so much the qualities necessary, as that you have a restlessness of spirit which counteracts those qualities to a large extent; that you have

gifts which can be more effectively used in the outside world. When you preached your novice's sermon to us at supper some months ago I could see then, what I would not say then, that you have great oratorical gifts. You would like to remain with us; if we allowed it you would probably acquire fame for yourself and for the Order; but if you have no vocation to the religious life your preaching powers would damn you. If it is hard for the rich man to enter into heaven, it is a hundred times harder for the popular preacher to do so. I am not saying, of course, that popular preachers *never* save their souls, any more than that rich men never save their souls, but I do ask you to note how many of the priests who have apostatized from the Church have won fame as preachers. The grace of God can of course keep a man, but the soul drunk with oratory is liable to pride of the most subtle and also the most overwhelming kind. That might be your fate, if after what we have said you insisted upon staying in the Order.

“Fortunately, however, you have yourself recognized the truth of what I am saying. You will go out into the world; you will almost certainly have periodical longings to be back. No man ever genuinely tried his vocation without having as a reward for his courageous generosity this cross laid upon him; ever afterwards he is ill at ease in the world. You are now a marked man. Your novitiate will not embitter your life, but will color it. Go out into the world. There is no reason why you should not be holy in the world. I am sure you will be a faithful and loyal son of the Church. Use your gifts, for you have great gifts. You are an artist with the artistic temperament. You are *not* a monk.”

Brother Gregory refilled and lit his pipe thoughtfully.

Then he said in conclusion of his story: "I think that is all that I can remember of the Guardian's little homily to me. Let it suffice as the explanation of why I leave."

## CHAPTER VII

AT first during his stay among the Franciscans at Slindon John was struck, as with a blow in the face, by the huge fact of heroic renunciation; later he came to be struck by the even more startling fact of the almost abnormal normality of the life passing around him. The monks had made their sacrifices, but the pruning of the defections of their souls was for a purpose—the purpose of richer fruit. They had thrown away in order to find. They made a supernatural effort so that they might remain natural.

The visitor got to know several of the members of the community well. When he was not spending the times of regular recreation among the novices, he spent them among the priests. These meetings were prescribed by the rule and were obligatory; but so far from being formal in spirit they were full of spontaneous fun, of a good deal of schoolboy gaiety. The idiosyncrasies of the religious arose from their being set free from so many of those social conventions that demand conformity to a type.

In the Common Room, however, one became acquainted only with one side of the friars—for it was, after all, the scene of a communal duty. The cells of individuals offered opportunities for more personal talk. In one or other of these cells he was constantly to be found. The lonely cenobites encouraged his

visits, and when he did not go to them, they went to look him up.

One morning Bradley was with the Novice Master. The old friar had made his profession nearly forty years ago. He was familiar with solitude and needed none of the entertainment of meeting a new acquaintance that some of the younger fathers so frankly enjoyed. His cell had long ago grown sufficient for him. But he invited John there, because he was interested in him, partly on account of so much of his history as he knew, partly on account of a remark made by the priest who had said the half-past-seven Mass during the past week, who had commented upon the fervent humility of John's manner while receiving Holy Communion.

The Novice Master's cell was the simplest and plainest in a house where all the cells were simple and plain. It contained a crucifix, a colored print of our Lady, a bed, a ledge at the angle of the walls that served for washstand, a pine-wood chest of drawers, and a kitchen table upon which the monk wrote. There was no looking-glass—for the Novice Master was able (like William Cobbett) to shave in the dark—nor bookcase, for the community library supplied any books that were needed. Even his breviary was signed *ad usum P. F. Aldhelmi*.

In theory, of course, the cameras, bicycles and books held by the other inmates of the monastery were held only *ad usum*. They were liable to be taken away at any time; and indeed it was customary for the friars periodically to make out inventories of their possessions for the Superior to renew or call in their leases as he deemed fit. But in practice the Superior allowed considerable latitude and was only likely to draw the line

at an extravagance like gold cuff-links or *éditions de luxe*. The principle of personal poverty would not be violated so long as the Father Guardian gave permission for property to be retained *ad usum*—even though he gave permission for a motor car or a hunter. Or rather, the Superior who gave the permission, not the subject who received it, would have broken his vow.

Father Aldhelm, however, never asked for permission to keep the smallest gift he received. Even the books he reviewed for the *Dublin Review* and the *Tablet* were passed on to the Librarian, as faithfully as the cheques in payment for the articles were passed on to the Procurator. The result was that though he did not exact such a high standard of destitution from his novices, they emulated his example.

The marks of Father Aldhelm's mortification were not lost upon John Bradley, who, after some general conversation, inquired, "What would you say was the chief motive of monasticism?"

Instantly the answer came. "The impossibility of finding any other earthly happiness."

"Is it so happy?"

"Yes. It frees the heart from cares and entanglements. It is rooted in dereliction—in the abandonment of desire."

"But most people, Father," said John, "would not call that happiness."

"I know, I know," responded the Monk in a sad voice. "Even we have to live from day to day. When we get up at dawn we ask for just enough grace to carry us through to nightfall. Our life does not get easier as we go on . . . but it gets happier. Bit by bit our mortal affections are put away; and the first excisions are easier than the last, for we are supported in youth by

our enthusiasms. . . . It is an increasingly painful process . . . but what else can we do? 'If thou would'st have Eternal Life, leave all and follow Me.' What else besides Eternal Life can satisfy us?"

The older friar went off into a reverie, seeking an answer to an unanswerable question, and when he awoke it was to tell his visitors that the novices would be professed that afternoon.

"I know, Father," said John. "Brother Gregory and I have been waiting here for that. Then we must leave. I'll be sorry to go."

"So will Gregory, I think," added the priest. "Even when a man has no vocation he can't tear himself easily from the cloister. That is the greatest secular strength of the monastic life. . . . I'm glad you'll be able to see the professions."

John also was glad to have the opportunity. Immediately after Vespers that afternoon the three novices of Michael's year at Slindon—Brother Luke, Brother Silvester and Brother Joseph—took their religious vows. At the beginning of the year five novices had been clothed with the habit together. One of these had left after three months of religious life; Brother Gregory was about to leave; each of the others had several times been on the point of leaving; each had the grace of perseverance given to him in his extremity and endured to the end.

Brother Luke was in one way an exception. He had never doubted his vocation. His mind, heart and will had all concurred in the joyful acceptance of the humble life of poverty, chastity, and obedience; his choice never faltered. Few men had been so clear in their call or so steadfast in surrender to it. He and the two re-

maining novices were now to make their religious profession.

John Bradley knelt alone in the church as the community filed in and, genuflecting before the Blessed Sacrament, took their stalls in the choir. Upon the altar steps a chair had been set, and upon this the Father Guardian seated himself.

Then the three novices entered and lay flat on the floor before him with arms stretched out in the form of a cross. There was a moment's silence, after which the Guardian asked, "*Quid queritis?*" It was the same question asked on the day of their clothing. The answer was the same as in the earlier ceremony. John knew from the ritual book before him that the novices replied, "*Misericordiam Dei et Vestram.*" He could not hear their words. But he saw a signal given for them to rise. They stood before the Guardian as he preached a little sermon to them.

"My dear brothers, a year ago you asked God's mercy and ours for the habit of the order. God gave you your vocation, and we accepted you into our family. God has given you that desire to serve Him more perfectly in religion, and the grace to fulfill your vocation. You stand here to-day with some knowledge of what it is you take upon yourselves. You know our life and what will be expected of you, and we who know you are ready to accept your vows in God's behalf.

"There is no need for me to tell you that the life you have chosen is an arduous one. Up to the present you have been free to lay aside your habit and to return to the world. From now on the rigors of our order become more serious to you, because you will vow to accept them and to live under them always.



"It is no light thing that you undertake. The vow of poverty cuts you off from the world and the things of the world. Remember that it is possible for a man to be in a religious order, and to own no personal property of any intrinsic value, yet to be worldly in spirit. If you keep this vow your heart will be detached from all material things and you will find in that fact a liberty and a fullness of possession impossible to those in the world. The vow of chastity will demand that you mortify many natural and proper affections of the heart in order that you may give your undivided love to God. The vow of obedience cuts even deeper. You will surrender your ambitions (that desire to please yourselves, which is the last thing to die in a man) to the will of your Superior.

"You are aware of all this. But it is my duty to remind you of it again. The monastic life is not all poetry. There will be many occasions when you will have to suffer and to do what must go against the grain of your nature. But such sufferings and deeds will be to you an incalculable means of grace. However high your positions may become or however humble, if they are offered to our Blessed Lord in a sincere desire to imitate His holy manhood, He will accept them and through them sanctify you. . . . Do you still desire to make your vows?"

Clearly the answers came: "Yes, Father."

Then one by one they knelt in turn before the Father Guardian, and, placing their hands between his, vowed to God ever to live under poverty, chastity, and obedience, according to the rule of St. Francis.

There was an entire absence of sentimentality. The Superior had put the case briefly and impartially before them and then called upon each soul to make its own

choice. Escape was possible even at the last minute, for there was no emotionalism to egg on to enthusiasm, only the note of responsibility, of free-will in the vows which were to be taken. Each novice accepted and embraced that responsibility.

Before the bell rang for the solemn silence and as the warning for the offices of Matins and Lauds, John knocked at the door of the Father Guardian's cell and was bidden to enter. The Superior sat at his table with a big briar between his lips, puffing vigorously and tapping the keys of his typewriter as furiously as he smoked. One could rarely catch this energetic priest doing anything else in his cell; for most of his reading was done in the small hours of the morning. The day itself went by in the tiptap of the little Blick.

"You've got your pipe? Fill up," said the Guardian, pointing to a jar on the edge of the bookcase.

"Father," John began, coming at once to the point; "I'm going away to-morrow and I want to tell you before I go that I'd like to join the order."

The priest nodded, without speaking or taking his pipe out of his mouth. He rather nonplussed John, who required some response to what he thought would prove a bombshell. "What do you think, Father?" the layman asked.

"Well, I'm not in the least surprised."

This again was disconcerting. John could not think of anything else to say except, "I want to take Brother Gregory's place."

"You're a hardened smoker, aren't you?" asked the Superior. (This seemed an odd way of carrying on this conversation.)

"Yes, Father."

"Well, you won't be able to smoke here, you know. Not as a novice, I mean. When you're ordained you'll be able to make up for lost time. But those who were big smokers before they were novices, often never go back to their pipes when they become priests. Not that that is true of me."

The Guardian broke off suddenly. "So you want to take Gregory's place. Perhaps you may. Some have the vocation and others haven't. It's difficult to tell without trial. Difficult enough even then. Nobody ever came here with a better will than did Brother Gregory, or ever display greater determination. He is a highly-gifted man and an excellent fellow. But we cannot feel that he has a vocation. We never could feel it."

John went on smoking in intent silence.

"By the way," said the Guardian, "notice how Gregory behaves after he leaves here. Of course, I haven't the smallest doubt that he'll be a most edifying Christian layman. He wants to be a priest—but no matter. We'll say that he makes a fine layman. Then when some of the younger friars hear that they'll come to me and say that we made a mistake in sending him away and that his good conduct in the world is a sign that he ought to have been allowed to make his profession."

The Guardian relighted his pipe. "Now, if he goes to the dogs after leaving here, I'll be certain that he should have stayed. It sometimes happens, you know; then it's a proof that the man missed his vocation. But Gregory won't go to the dogs because he was not called to be a monk."

This was a new and surprising view of the matter to John, who asked, "How does one know one's vocation?"

"Only by waiting patiently. It's all a question of the will of God and of your obedience. It's not at all a question of inclination. There are some men who seem not so much to have chosen as to have *been chosen*. Brother Gregory wanted the vocation and didn't get it; another of the novices did not want it, fought against it, and yet accepted it. Such have very often been happiest in the end.

"Did you know what happened to me? I came here when I was eighteen. After a week, before I was even clothed with the habit, I fled from the place. There is a story told that I said to the Father who took me to the gate, 'I never want to see the damned hole again!' But I deny that I said that. Two years later I came back. My novitiate was hell to me. One day dear old Father Bernard, who was the Guardian in my day, met me walking in the garden, and asked me how I was getting along. I burst out crying, 'It isn't natural, Father; it isn't natural!' He just put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'Of course it's not natural, my boy. What you are trying to do is a supernatural thing and is only possible by means of the grace of God.' I stuck it out somehow or other, and now, if I had to choose my life a hundred times over, I would be a Franciscan each time. Have you a sense of humor, Mr. Bradley?"

Nobody will confess that lack. A man will admit the seven deadly sins sooner than admit that he cannot see a joke. But John Bradley, for all his spiritual attitudinizing of the past, had in him the savor and the sting of laughter, the fundamental humor which is not always given to great wits.

John's mouth twitched a little. "I think I have it, father."

The priest looked swiftly at him. "I think you have.

Well, it's a great help in the religious life. Hilarity is as necessary to us Franciscans as holiness; it is in fact a part of holiness. That I think was Donovan's trouble or the root of it. He *would* take things so seriously. He could laugh. He was a wit—but he did not know very much about that mystical laughter in sympathy with the laughter of God. He couldn't laugh at himself."

A sepulchral bell rang in slow strokes from the church tower, and the Guardian said, rising, "Excuse me a moment. I want to tell one of the Fathers that I shall not be down to Matins. You and I shan't have another chance to talk."

When the Superior returned, he refilled his pipe and asked, "What makes you think you have a vocation?"

It was a question that John was totally unable to answer. But he said, "May I tell you about myself? You may be able to understand?"

He told his spiritual history, saying practically nothing about his marriage—nothing that could lead anyone to suppose that it had been a tragedy—confining himself to his evangelical upbringing, his revolt from the Calvinistic creed, his disappointment with Catholicism when he first became acquainted with it in the tin chapel, his friendship for Donovan, his illness, and—Philadelphia.

When he concluded the Guardian said, "Well, I think I understand pretty well. You appear——"

John interrupted with, "Father the one fact I am most certain of in this tangled world is the fact of Providence. I see now—though only in part—how God has made even my follies serve His purpose."

"There is one thing I wanted to say, Mr. Bradley," went on the Guardian; "you have been married. We

don't often get married men—but that's no drawback. Indeed, I believe you will be all the better as a monk in consequence. Well, monastic life is not nearly so difficult as married life. It's by no means easy for the brethren to get along with one another always without friction—they're only human, very human. I think your having been married will help you."

John looked up at him swiftly and in consternation. He went pale and spoke with difficulty. "How did you know that my marriage was unhappy?"

"My poor boy," said the priest, "I didn't know it. I'm sorry to hear it. But I wasn't speaking of unhappy marriages, but of *all* marriages. It's a miracle every time that they're successful. We monks make a family, but we haven't that close proximity, that psychological sensitiveness that makes the relations of husband and wife so delicate a matter."

John smiled a little and the Guardian noticed the amazement. "You wonder," he asked, "how I know? What do I, a celibate, know of marriage?"

Bradley was confused and did not reply. The monk went on. "Well, I've heard many thousands of confessions in my life. I can't help knowing after that. Marriage is a difficult job—under the most fortunate of circumstances. That's its chief virtue. The only thing that makes it tolerable is incompatibility of temperament."

The friar sucked at his pipe in silence for several minutes, during which John did not venture to speak. Breaking the silence the priest said, "I am ready to believe that you have a vocation; but my Provincial wouldn't let me take you at once. In any case I don't think that would be advisable. You have nothing to lose by waiting. You're a recent convert. Get accli-

matized to Catholicism and don't be in too much of a hurry. If you're still of the same mind in twelve months' time come to us. . . . Pray for me. I'll pray for you. . . . Good night, and God bless you."

Brother Gregory drew off his capuce, cord and rosary, and, having kissed them, laid them upon his bed. Then his habit was shed, and the gray suit he had spread out ready on his bed was put on. He had often changed into layman's dress before at Slindon when going into Arundel on recreation or on business; but it was always to come back to the habit. The action now was symbolical. It was the last time he would touch the sign of his religious state. His tonsure luckily had not been re-shaved for a fortnight, and after the surrounding corona of hair had been closely clipped there was hardly any indication, except to those who knowingly looked, that his crown had been shaven but a little while before. He completed the packing of his bag, and then went the round of the community to say his farewells.

Michael had grown to love the monastery with a deep tenderness, and the friars had made him part of the family. He was to say good-by! To lose the world seemed at that moment a lesser matter than to lose all this. To each of the Fathers in their cells he went, kneeling to each for his blessing; then to the Father Guardian.

"Well, it's no longer Brother Gregory! We are all sorry to lose you, my boy, and shall always have affectionate remembrances of you. We shall have a cell ready for you when you come here on a visit. All you have to do is to send a postcard."

Michael dropped upon one knee and the Guardian raised his fingers in blessing.

The Novice Master was left until last. His cell was at the quadrangle side of the corridor, and through its window Michael looked out on to the square of turf, the side of the gray Gothic church and the plain stone crosses which marked the graves of dead members of the community. Michael nearly broke down. He wanted to fling himself on his knees before Father Aldhelm, and beg to be allowed to stay. He brushed a tear away with his hand, turning his face from the Novice Master's eyes.

The gentle old friar was moved in his turn. "Don't! my dear brother, it is hard going away from here. But you will in time get over this pang. We shall always pray for you."

The three novices met John and Michael at the entrance porch and the two seniors, Brother Luke and Brother Silvester, dressed in clerical clothes for the first time, accompanied them to the station and carried their bags. They were all sorry to lose Brother Gregory, for the novitiate of that year had been an exceptionally merry one, filled with laughter and song and a companionship in a great ideal.

Brother Luke, divining that "cheering up" was necessary to the departing friar, broached the never failing theme of the "glories of grub." True, the man practiced what he preached to some extent, but his preaching was largely done to make people laugh, not so much at the joke as the joker. So at least Michael had at last come to suspect, for he noticed that the novice, in spite of his reputation, was at bottom exceedingly strict with himself. He anointed his face with oil, reversing the



custom of the Pharisees, that men might not observe the fasts he underwent. *Fasting* in the strict sense of the word he did not practice, but there were austerities in his life which passed without comment while his companions were laughing at his self-indulgence. For one last three quarters of an hour he spoke on his favorite subject.

"I wish," he said with a demeanor of the utmost seriousness, "that the Provincial would put me under a formal precept to feed up, and so increase my store of energy."

Brother Silvester retorted: "If the Provincial laid you under obedience it would be to cut down your diet by one half."

Brother Luke was horrified at the bare suggestion. "He couldn't have the cruelty to give me so terrible a penance. If he did, there would only be one thing to do; I would have to dwell upon the prospect of heavenly banquets. For when we have glorified bodies, it logically follows that we shall also have glorified stomachs."

They went on, Michael and his companions heavy of heart, despite Brother Luke's absurd eloquence. They reached the station a few minutes later. The train rumbled in. Brother Luke's discourse was cut short. Only for the moment, however; as soon as Michael and John had found an empty carriage, the novice continued: "When we have glorified stomachs we shall be able to take in food by the ton instead of spoonful. It almost makes me feel as if I had a glorified stomach now, to think of it! Ooh! ooh! Won't heaven be a blessed place? In future, all my meditations will run on death; on every variety of death—slow decline, lingering and painful illness——"

"Sudden death, if you don't shut up," said Michael

as the guard slammed the door in passing. "Good-by! The train's off!"

Brother Luke went on as if in rapture, "Senile decay, apoplexy——"

The whistle blew and the train began to move out of the station. The young friar, fired by the splendor of a sudden thought, ran alongside of the moving carriage.

"What king was it that died from overeating lam-preys?" he asked anxiously.

"Nebuchadnezzar, I expect, you ass!" Michael bel-lowed back.



## PART IV



## CHAPTER I

**J**OHAN BRADLEY rarely went out to the Café Royal or indeed to any such place, for the old circle was broken up. Maurice Cregan returned to Ireland to start building on his own account some six months ago; and House practically never came to Edith Road where John was staying with the Donovans. Occasionally they met in the city where a vague job helped the prospective Franciscan to justify his probationary period—but the old circle was broken up.

To-night it was to be restored. Cregan has written from Belfast announcing a short visit on business to London and naming the Café Royal as a *rendezvous* at which he and House could be met. Michael was engaged; so the circle could not be complete; enough would be restored, however, to make John look forward to the meeting.

At nine o'clock that April night he walked across St. James' Park, glittering in moonlight and frost, up the lower end of Regent Street, through Piccadilly Circus until he came to the door of the Café. It seemed strange to be going inside.

The large room was densely crowded and the air was thick with smoke that floated up in dense clouds towards the figures sprawling on the ceiling. The crowd was the same old Café Royal crowd. The young men in the same (or a similar) mid-Victorian dress, the same little mutton-chop whiskers, and with the same wide black tape emphasizing his eyeglasses lolled against the

same pillar. Ladies whose bizarre gowns were new but who had the same accumulative effect were smoking cigarettes, drinking whiskey and ogling their male neighbors just as they had done a couple of years ago. The same shabby artists and the same immaculate men-about-town occupied the same plush seats. Everything was unchanged, frozen with the ancient bohemian conventions, with the world-weariness of the world.

It was not easy for John to find his friends amid that company. He walked through the room without catching sight of them and was beginning to think that they had not arrived when the big broad bowed back of a man at the corner table caught his eye, and he made his way through the dense crowd.

Even House and Cregan were doing the same old thing. They were telling bawdy stories. If Michael were here, they would be arguing about religion. He was absent, so they were telling bawdy stories.

John sat down with them and ordered his drink and allowed the tale to proceed. House told it admirably and the three men laughed until the tears ran down their faces.

Some time ago, in his early days as a Catholic, Bradley had often reproached himself for listening and laughing at such tales. He took his remorse into the confessional accusing himself of sin. The priest said, "Were the stories funny?" "Yes, Father," was the response. "Very funny?" the confessor persisted. The penitent wondering at the question, admitted that they had been very funny. "Then it would be almost a sin not to laugh at them. . . ." The priest could not resist putting his point in this way: but so as not to scandalize a tender conscience he entered into a more detailed explanation of the case. The humor of bawdy

stories, he assured the kneeling figure, was their redemption. One laughed at their funniness, not at their filth. "I am not encouraging you to cultivate this particular form of humor, my son," he went on, "but I only want to help you to get rid of your scruples. If these matters are to be discussed it is very much to be preferred that they should be discussed in jest than in earnest. What are called 'smutty-yarns' are often a safety-valve. They are harmless so long as they are comical."

When John thought over this startling opinion afterwards, he became more and more convinced of its sanity. Neither House nor Cregan, for instance, were licentious men—quite the contrary. Cregan was a fierce woman-hater and appeared to be invulnerable against seduction. House was an enthusiast upon the subject of women to the point of sentimentality. He could not be described as an uxorious husband in practice; but his principles were uxorious. Indeed among many of the light loves of the Café Royal whom he had tried to recall to decency he was spoken of as "The chap that makes you feel you want to be good." They gave him a wide berth, because of his infection of virtue.

So John sat down; drank his absinthe; and laughed, without any qualms of conscience, to House's bawdy story. There was no reason why he should not laugh. There was in it the coarse geniality of Rabelais; nothing of the delicate cruelty of D. H. Lawrence.

"Why haven't you brought Donovan along?" Cregan demanded as the mirth subsided.

"He was engaged to give a lecture in Clapham to-night," John answered, "I bear his apologies."

"So he didn't stick his bally monastery?" Maurice continued. "I never thought he would. A fellow like



him was certain to get disgusted with the hypocrisy of monkery."

John laughed and told the Irishman that he himself had spent a pleasant fortnight at Slindon, and that monastic hypocrisy was not greatly in evidence during his visit. "Besides, you know, Maurice," he added, "Michael did not chuck it up of his own accord. The monks told him he wasn't cut out for their life."

"Umph!" Cregan grunted. "They have more sense than I imagined; only you never can tell what craftiness there may be at the bottom of them sending him away." He paused a moment and finished his drink before asking, "What does he propose doing? Going back to journalism?"

"Yes," said John. "He has gone back to journalism for the present. But he has an idea at the back of his mind that he ought to become an ordinary priest, even if he couldn't be a monk."

The news made Maurice very angry. "I've just come back from Ireland," he said. "You don't know what priests are here. They're on their best behavior in a Protestant country. But let them have their heads and see what happens! Compare Catholic poverty with Protestant prosperity!"

House grinned. "He's come back a greater bigot than ever, you see Bradley, after drinking Boyne water. . . . Three more whiskeys, here, waiter."

John thrust more strongly. "I should have imagined that you've seen quite enough of the union between Protestantism and Business in Willow & Wainwright's. I hardly guessed that you'd be asking for more."

"Oh, there's a difference," retorted Maurice. "It isn't the business I object to so much as Willow & Wain-

wright's business methods. You get a very different type of business man in Belfast."

House pointed a mocking finger at Cregan.

"Leave him to me," John cried, growing excited. "Do you realize, Maurice, that Protestantism is the only religion that uses the argument of material prosperity as a proof of theological correctness? According to that line of reasoning Rockefeller and Carnegie must be the two greatest philosophers that ever existed—which I gravely doubt."

Here House intervened on the Catholic side, the side he always defended, though a professed agnostic. In this debate more than his philosophical habits were involved; a defense of prosperity of the capitalist type provoked the socialist in him. He thundered out, "If the poverty of Catholics proves anything, it proves that Catholicism is true. Where should the despised and rejected of men find His place except among the despised and rejected? Did He choose the powerful and the rich to be His friends? No. Fishermen were His apostles, with an odd publican thrown in. And when these deserted Him on Calvary, a harlot stood weeping with His mother beneath His cross."

Rhetoric had no effect upon the dogged Cregan. "You're a socialist," he sneered; then turning to John, said, "You admit the poverty of Catholic countries, then? Very good. That's all I wanted."

The disputants broke away, dropping a debate which each conducted from so different a premise. Both Cregan and Bradley were satisfied that they were triumphant. Maurice contented himself with saying nothing more controversial than, "I see they've made a pretty fine fanatic of you. I suppose you won't ob-

ject to my congratulating myself upon my prophetic powers."

"Go ahead. Claim anything you like. I shan't object. Only tell me *how* you are a prophet?"

Maurice looked steadily at his friend and asked a question in his turn. "Who was it said that you would become a Catholic?"

"Yes," answered John smiling, "You said it. Let us, House," he went on, rising with the slightest hint of unsteadiness, glass in hand, "drink to the health of Mr. Maurice Cregan, the Meltonian Soothsayer. He will shortly give vent to one of his remarkable predictions. Gentlemen, Mr. Cregan!"

Maurice answered in great good-humor. "You're drunk, Bradley. But not drunk enough perhaps to deny the effectiveness of my powers as a diviner. I'll bet that you mean to become one of your blasted monks."

John again rose, rather more unsteadily (for he was not used to drinking absinthe and whiskey in alternate doses) and grasping Cregan's hand shouted, "You're right again, old boy. That's exactly what I mean to do." He had been careful to conceal his intentions hitherto; controversy and drink revealed them.

Maurice's good humor vanished suddenly. "When do you mean to give up making a fool of yourself?" he demanded petulantly.

A mist was settling upon John's mind, but it lifted a moment, long enough for him to say, "A man must be a bloody fool if he can't make a fool of himself sometimes. Now a fool, Maurice," (the cloud descended again) "a fool—I forget what I was going to say——"

"It really doesn't matter. You'll remember it again soon. Drink some coffee and then you'll be ready to

give Cregan hell. . . . Waiter," roared House, at a pallid Swiss, "three coffees. Quick!"

Strong coffee can do a great deal for a man in the earlier stages of fuddledom. In a quarter of an hour Bradley's brain was clear once more and his courage unabated.

"I say," chortled House. "You'll never make a good monk if you get drunk so easily."

The Irishman was not in the mood for such levity. "Look here, John," he said, "this Catholicism of yours is all damn rot. You got under Donovan's spell and his poetry did the trick for you. It's very understandable—but you mustn't talk as if you had any real reason for what you have done."

"Would it amaze you very much, Maurice," was the reply, "if I told you that the only reason for my becoming a Catholic was the fact that it was the only system I could discover that held water?" He knew the Ulsterman would be infuriated by this use of his favorite argument.

Cregan was infuriated. "Good Lord, man?" he cried. "I know why you became a Catholic. I know that you had nothing to say against the dogmas of Calvinism; I know that you admitted that they held water. Your rejection of them was merely emotional. They *do* hold water."

"Such dirty water," put in John contemptuously.

Maurice ignored the interjection. "You got disgusted with the sort of religion we had pushed down our throats at Willow & Wainwright's. Let me inform you that *that* is not Protestantism."

"What was it then?" Bradley inquired.

"Humbug."

"True, but Protestantism is the cause of the humbug."

"Well, what about Borgia, then?" asked Cregan inconsequently, losing his head, and the thread of the argument.

"We Catholics are not all saints. Remember we belong to the *Catholic* church, one which has included all kinds of people, good, bad, and indifferent."

"Yes, but Borgia was a pope. Not the only bad pope either!"

"Precisely," said John, "but even that is an argument for the Faith. To begin with, bad popes know quite well that they are sinners. They never pretended that their villainy was sanctity. One might almost say that bad popes and bad priests prove the divinity of the Church. Now anywhere else a man owes his spiritual position to his personal and accidental gifts. He is a minister because he can preach, or because he has a charming or sympathetic nature, because of his scholarship or of his holiness of life. The man's spiritual authority resides in himself, he had to be eloquent or hard working, or holy to keep his job. Now when the *man* is the center of things, he has (if really eloquent or devoted) terrible temptations to pride; if he isn't really holy he has to keep up the appearance of godliness. With our priests it is different. Their powers and functions are bestowed upon them. They may personally be very bad men, but that does not in the slightest degree invalidate the sacraments which they administer.

"I heard of a priest in Texas whose relations with his housekeeper were not all that they should have been. He also was a drunkard. But his people wanted the

sacraments, whatever the respectability of their priest. Every Saturday night a cordon was drawn about his house to prevent drink going in. And every Saturday night the depraved housekeeper hid the key of the spirit locker.

"Now that's what I call a virile religion. A priest is under no temptation to pride, simply because the priesthood is not based upon his worthiness, but upon the authority of the Church. A priest in mortal sin will commit sacrilege by saying Mass, but the Mass he says will be no less a Mass because of the priest's sinfulness. One might almost say that priesthood is the one safeguard against sacerdotalism."

"I see there is something in that," Maurice said, "but why the devil do you want to become a monk?"

"Because I believe it is my vocation," John answered.

"Oh, rubbish! Look at Donovan. There is a man older than you, a Catholic and a good Catholic all his life, and what happened to him? He stuck it out, but now he admits he was quite wrong about his vocation. What chance do you think you have of succeeding when he failed?"

"But, my dear Maurice, if I have no vocation I shall not stay. I am going to *try* my vocation. There is a full year before me during which I ought to be able to find out if I am cut out to be a monk. And remember, the monks themselves have a say in the matter. They don't hypnotize people into staying. They told Donovan quite plainly that he had better leave. They may tell me to leave, I may leave even if they don't tell me to do so. A year is a long time to test a thing."

Maurice then gave it up, consoling himself with the certainty that John would ultimately leave the cloister.

He invented then and there in secret a theory to explain the case. He flattered himself that it was a profoundly cunning theory. People would be convinced by it when he said, "Perfectly natural, you know. The poor fellow has had to go through it. Feels the world a vile and worthless place and wants to escape from it. But he'll come back. Things will be seen in a different light after a few months at Slindon. Catholics are queer people. You know I was brought up with the idea that they were all either terribly wicked or stolidly unintelligent. Both ideas are wrong. All the Catholics I've met were very decent people, and they're not unintelligent. Not even superstitious. A man like Donovan apart from his religion is the most cynical, skeptical sort of a devil—a mind like steel and no kind of respect for sentimentalism. And what's more, they all seem to be like that. The only explanation that I can think of is that they must have a kink in their nature. You never know where they are going to break out." Maurice was rather proud of his theory.

The theory, however, remained for the present in lavender. House began to speak. "Did you ever see a picture, Bradley, called 'More Heavens than One'—a nun passing an open door and seeing a mother nursing her baby?"

John answered that he had seen it.

"Well, that's what I think about monasticism . . . and yet, I don't know but that you're right and Cregan wrong. Life is so full of worry and money grubbing that I think if I weren't married I would become a monk myself. It would mean escape——" He thumped the table with his fist. "Life's too complex," he declared, lifting his absinthe to his lips. "Too much

luxury about it. In a monastery is quiet and peace.  
At least there

'Be the day short or be the day long,  
Sometime it ringeth to evensong!'"

He quoted, grave with emotion.

They were preparing to leave. As a first step towards doing so, fresh drinks were ordered. John felt sufficiently recovered to venture upon a final "Scotch" and was raising it to his lips when he saw Maude pass out. For a moment he held his breath: then drew a sigh of relief knowing that she and all she stood for had passed out of his life forever. On the threshold of the Café, unconscious of the irony, she passed the man who several years ago had robbed her of her spoils. She did not recognize him; nor was she aware of John's presence in the room.

"Come along, Donovan," called the delighted Cregan. "We're having a great time. Here's House, pinning for the cowl of a monk."

"Really!" said the ex-Franciscan coming up. "This is interesting! What order do you propose to join?"

"Tell me first where your cord is," insisted House, facetious by now.

"Tell me first about *your* order. Which one is going to acquire you?"

It was impossible to make House drunk. If it had been possible he would have been drunk long before the time when Donovan crossed Maude on the threshold of the Café Royal. But though the Napoleonic socialist was impervious to strong waters, he readily grew solemnly sentimental. "You know," he said as Michael



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sat down in the vacant seat at their table, "you know I have the utmost respect for the Catholic Church. I cannot bring myself to accept her doctrines, but I would like to be a Catholic. I've often told you that if I had any religion it would be that of the Catholic Church."

"It's very obliging of you to say so, House," said Michael. "But what about that religious order?"

Unconscious of the interruption House went on, "It is the home for poor sinners; I am one. Many a time I've felt that I could sell my soul to the devil if only I could go to confession. I love the Catholic church; I'd be a Catholic to-morrow, except for one thing."

"Which is——?" inquired Cregan, as interested as John and Michael were amused.

"That I don't believe in it." House roared with laughter. Sentimentalist as he was, he could not be purely sentimental at a stretch. Humor played the direct havoc with his heart.

"What about the religious order?" demanded Donovan again.

"Well, if you must know, I'd like to found a new religious order—taking in all the good points of the existing religious orders. It would be something like the Jesuits and something like the Carmelities."

"A fascinating combination," the ex-Franciscan thought.

"Perhaps, however," continued House, "the nearest suggestion I could give of what I have in my mind is an order in which the Benedictine and the Carthusian were mingled together."

"When you do found it, House," said Michael. "Let me know. I'd like to join with you. It sounds awfully jolly—very much like a cocktail!"

## CHAPTER II

THE quiet regular life of the Donovan household was pleasantly disturbed by the irruption of Maurice Cregan. For he not only brought with him the excuse—indeed the duty—of several loud argumentative evenings in the Café Royal and in House's house, but took John to their old haunts at Golders Green. "The Saracens" was revisited. Maurice's uncle and aunt were found to be as genial as ever though slightly suspicious of John Bradley as a Catholic. And the marriage of Willow & Wainwright to Meltonianism had resulted in the birth of several new roads in the vicinity of the "Cathedral."

Mr. Wainwright had grown rather stouter; even his head appeared to be of larger dimensions, for his bowler hat sat more tightly than before upon it, making a deeper and a redder mark upon its owner's forehead. The builder appeared to be in high good-humor, accosting them with the Hibernian salutation of "top o' the marnin' to ye," which was the signal of his self-complacency. It was also intended to be a delicate compliment to Cregan's nationality.

The Lord had prospered the work of the pious Meltonian's hands. So he who had been blessed himself admitted. "He does not suffer his people to want," was a sentence that was repeated over and over during their interview, as a kind of Greek Chorus. The main cause for this thankfulness to heaven was the establishment of a colony similar to that of Golders Green at Worthing. The original branch of the firm was also doing exceedingly well.

The Willow & Wainwright estate at Worthing was

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run on similar lines to that existing at Golders Green. At present the system had not become so perfected as in their London experiment, nor was working so extensively, but it showed every sign of eventually rivaling its parent's success. Comfortable and artistic little villas were erected there as at Golders Green, and were snapped up immediately by the pious Meltonians. It is true that so dignified a chapel had not yet been built at Worthing, but the temporary corrugated iron structure was shortly to make place for a building which was to be almost as large and splendid as the "Meltonian Cathedral." Here as in London the motto "Not slothful in business, serving the Lord" proved an efficient working maxim.

Wainwright handed each of his visitors a card which bore his Worthing address:

EBENEZER,  
ST. WINIFRED'S AVENUE—

with an invitation to them to look him up there, should they ever be in Worthing.

St. Winifred's Avenue owed its name—somewhat flavoured of a faint Romanism—to the fact that it was a road titled and partly built upon before the advent of the God-fearing Willow & Wainwright, Ltd. One end had been included in their estate, and at the corner which began the series of evangelical streets—King's Road, Lord's Drive, Melton Road, Bethany Avenue—was erected the small but comfortable house of Mr. Wainwright. He only occupied it during the summer months—for during that season of the year business flourished most vigorously at Worthing; children's meetings on the sands were possible and the bright bracing sea air invigorating to the servant of the Lord.

As an antidote to "St. Winifred" James Walsh Wainwright's house was inscribed "Ebenezer".

Mr. Wainwright's life was not without crosses—what Christian is there who does not have to carry heaviness for a season? Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth; and the Lord loved James Wainwright too well not to chasten him occasionally.

"I suppose," he said, putting on his little tight bowler hat and inviting John and Maurice to lunch, "you know that Willow has left me?"

"No," they answered. "We did not know."

"Well, he has," the builder went on in a tone of gloomy resignation. "The partnership was dissolved last year."

His guests made no reply, so he continued, "Of course he was not a business man, I couldn't leave him to look after much—or I'd soon have been in the workhouse. . . . But he left under rather painful circumstances. It was very awkward. Most of the capital was his, you know."

John inquired what he was doing. Was he still living here?

"No, in Tunbridge Wells, I am sorry to say."

There did not appear to be any special reason why a residence at Tunbridge Wells should be matter for sorrow, but something in the speaker's voice hinted at a scandal. They waited to hear the rest. Wainwright told it with difficulty, covered with shame at the remembrance of a brother falling so sadly from grace. "He is no longer a Meltonian, and——" the stout builder paused, wiping perspiration off his forehead, "he has invested all his money in brewery shares."

"I am surprised to hear that," said Maurice, as gravely and sympathetically as he knew how.

"Ah, well," answered Wainwright, sighing piously, "the Lord does not suffer His people to want. These are trials sent to us for our good. But I don't like to think of Willow falling so seriously from grace. It's a terrible fact to contemplate."

There were people, trade rivals and traducers of the faithful, over whose eternal destiny the director of this Christian firm could feel what amounted to a somber satisfaction—woe to him who put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed! In certain cases, that of his head clerk for example, there could even be some joy in suffering persecution at their hands—so long as they did their work efficiently and helped the business. It was even a manifestation of the mysterious workings of providence over again, the Lord guiding Cyrus who knew Him not! They assisted God's cause even though they despised His people. And James Wainwright, one of His people, a chosen vessel of the Meltonians, did not mind being despised. When particularly mortified he would cry, "Thank God I am humble!"

But while he could patiently suffer persecution that contained some kind of material compensation, to the form of persecution that his late partner had offered he was vulnerable. A stormy scene, as he had remembered it, and in a twinkling, as it appeared, Willow wanted to dissolve the company and to withdraw his own money. Only the providential discovery (in answer to prayer) of an elderly lady upon the estate who could be persuaded by means of Meltonian missionary need and a five per cent preference to take over Mr. Willow's liabilities, prevented the business from falling to pieces. But the Lord does not suffer His people to want. The financial readjustment proved financially beneficial. Mr. Wainwright was flourishing as

he had never flourished before. Hence his high good-humor.

They sat down to an enormous steak and kidney pudding which the Meltonian's angular spouse (Miss Goole that was) had cooked for her husband and the two podgy boys who were the fruit of their union.

The house was charmingly decorated and furnished. The Wainwrights had moved since the days when John, upon first coming to London, had been bidden to cold supper and funereal or jiggy Sankey and Moody hymns on a Sunday evening after the service at the chapel. The Lord decidedly had not suffered his people to want, thought the Catholic visitor, as his eye took in all the indications of an increasing prosperity.

"Nice little place, isn't it?" said Wainwright, noticing John's approving critical eye.

"Very nice. . . . Your old house was comfortable too."

"So it was. Quite comfortable enough as far as our own wants were concerned, but we have had to study the business. We've put the organ upstairs; that grand piano is new. It cost a hundred and twenty guineas. You may think it extravagant to spend so much—but we must do it. As a Christian I would be content with very much less—with one servant instead of four, for instance—but as a business man I have to keep up an establishment that in many ways goes beyond Christian simplicity."

"It's the motive with which we do things that matters; not the things themselves, isn't it?" said John, cloaking his scorn with solemnity, and avoiding Maurice's glance. The sentiment was heartily applauded by Mr. and Mrs. Wainwright.

"That's exactly what I say, isn't it, Sophy?"

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Mrs. Wainwright, confirming the truth of his statement, her spouse went on to explain confidentially that the splendors of their establishment were intended to impress prospective purchasers of the Golders Green villas. "This is a show house—one I can take people over, to show what the firm can do. It's an advertisement."

John Bradley's comment concerning the spirit of Christian simplicity had commended itself so much to Mr. Wainwright, that he took it as an indication of a sanctification which his visitor had not conspicuously displayed when he had been in his employment. It encouraged the host to make inquiries of a spiritual nature which he had hitherto avoided.

"Where are you living now?" was the first question.

"In West Kensington," Bradley answered.

"Oh, I suppose then that you'll be attending the chapel in Hammersmith—or is the one in Fulham nearer?"

John had not intended to conceal his reception into the Catholic Church, but he did not wish to reveal it at once. That would be to spoil an edifying conversation he was enjoying intensely. There was now no help for it. The fat must be thrown into the fire.

Upon hearing the news of the conversion (a word which it seemed to Mr. Wainwright a blasphemy to use in this connection) their host's genial manner instantly altered. He was shocked—deeply and obviously shocked. Indeed the announcement filled him with a far greater horror than that induced by Mr. Willow's defection from Meltonianism. Even membership of the Church of England (to whose communion Mr. Willow had reverted) though it was rendered more painful by the fact of the investment in brewery shares, was not

comparable in depravity with what John had done. That a Catholic should be sitting at that board! That he should have the insolence to talk about his "conversion," that he should deceitfully take part in godly conversation—was not to be endured.

Mr. Wainwright gasped. Mrs. Wainwright gave a half suppressed shriek. The little Wainwrights stared at the monstrosity before them. It was some moments before the builder could ask Maurice if he, too, had become a Romanist.

Reassured on that point, doubly reassured by the vehemence with which Cregan denied the loathsome suggestion, Mr. Wainwright recovered sufficiently to be able to control his horror. His initial impulse had been to clear his house of such pestiferous intruders. True he was their host—but hospitality ought not to be subjected to such an affront. He restrained his feelings, however. Though geniality had fled, a reasonable minimum of politeness remained. There was only one Catholic here—a lion among a den of Daniels—they had no reason to fear the machiavellian machinations of Rome.

He began that peculiar form of disconnected attack that is commonly employed by Protestant controversialists; jumping rapidly from relics to holy water, and from holy water to vestments in a way that was baffling for the Catholic to follow. John answered his questions, in so far as he was allowed the time and opportunity of doing so, finding this kind of debate, single-handed against Mr. and Mrs. Wainwright and Maurice, good fun if somewhat confusing.

"How can you believe," Wainwright asked, "in getting your sins forgiven for money?"

"We don't," said John bluntly.

"Come, come," went on Mr. Wainwright. "It is com-



mon knowledge that priests demand money for absolution."

"Mr. Wainwright, I am a Catholic, and have been to confession frequently. You must accept my assurance that no money ever passes."

The builder was openly incredulous. Still, one cannot call a man a liar to his face, so he said, "No. Perhaps not in England, but certainly it does on the continent and in Ireland."

John could no longer contain himself. "Surely we Catholics ought to know what we do or do not practice and believe. You seem to consider yourself to be more infallible about our doctrines than the Pope himself!"

The Meltonian thrust home. "You deny absolution being sold? Well, I have actually held in my hand a"—(he hesitated over the word)—"a bloody heart!"

The two boys giggled before being sharply suppressed by their mother. Mr. Wainwright looked triumphant, and John laughed outright.

"I suppose you mean a badge of the Sacred Heart," he said after a moment spent wildly wondering what could be meant. "That has nothing to do with absolution. It is only a badge which one can buy in a shop just as one buys a hymnbook. It is a badge—nothing else. I believe an indulgence is given to those who wear it devoutly. That's probably what you're referring to."

He had a wicked longing to tell Mr. Wainwright that the "Bloody Heart" was all "Bloody Rot"—but by a superhuman effort he manacled his tongue. The only possible retort was made impossible.

After the mild excitement consequent upon Maurice Cregan's visit to London had ended (it had an aftermath in the shape of two or three tracts relative to the

corruption of the Catholic Church, sent, as was suspected, by poor Arthur Monson), John's life resumed its regular tenor in the Donovan household.

During the day the expectant Franciscan had a not very exacting job as temporary clerk in an insurance office. It did not interest him to the slightest degree, but it served to supply his moderate needs until Slin-don was open to him. His evenings were spent with the Donovans, who were glad to have him staying in their house, into which a brooding religious peace seemed to have centered. If ever he went out it was to go for a walk with Michael. If he stayed in he either talked with Michael or read Horace and Cicero in an attempt to furbish up a somewhat rusty Latin, as a preparation for his novitiate.

The days followed each other, nearly as devoid of remarkable incident as were days spent in the cloister. Michael and John attended the half-past-seven mass in Brook Green every morning; by half-past eight they would be back to breakfast; by nine the one man would be in his study, the other on a bus on his way to the office; at seven they dined and by eleven were in bed. Michael occasionally gave a literary lecture in the suburbs to which John usually accompanied him, or looked in to correct his proofs at the office of one of the daily papers for which he did free-lance work. Otherwise the uniformity of the days was complete. Only to a couple of dates did John look forward—to one in August, when Marjorie was to come to England for a holiday, to another in October, when the year of waiting prescribed by the Father Guardian would be ended.

Sedate habits had become established at Edith Road. Mrs. Donovan was by nature a demure little lady and had long ago laid aside any boisterous qualities which

may have been part of her youth. John, like most Englishmen, could be boisterous at times, but needed an external stimulus that was lacking now. He was busy with his books, and though happier than he had ever been, looked back to memories that awoke sorrow and forward to expectations that awoke seriousness. It was Michael Donovan who controlled the household with his little finger; and the old Michael Donovan, the eloquent, irrepressible, irresponsible, was a creature of the past. Now none among that quiet group was so quiet as he.

Silence and he were inseparable. He had become extraordinarily gentle. The old wit was not exhausted but the sting was drawn. One could never provoke him into argument—House and Cregan had tried in vain—and though they, as he knew, would not impute malice to his invective, he seemed to have a strong repugnance to drawing blood. His eye would twinkle but his lips would only smile as others spoke. They never opened in confutation.

This gentleness was not confined to a forswearing of what is to such a man one of the most powerful of the passions—argument; it covered all his actions. He went through life on tiptoe, as a man walks through a room full of sleepers; he seemed afraid of waking a slumbering fate too soon. His object seemed to be to escape notice, to be passed over by a watching eye, to be left alone with solitude.

He was working steadily and quietly upon something whose results were not soon apparent—probably upon a book; but no questionings extracted from him the nature of his work. If anyone knocked at his study door they heard a drawer softly open and shut inside the room. Michael would be found smoking a contempla-

tive pipe and reading a paper or writing a letter. He had never been secretive before.

"What do you suppose Michael is up to?" Mrs. Donovan asked John, coming into the drawing-room after one of her many expeditions of curiosity.

"I haven't any idea, Mrs. Donovan. It's not like him to be so shy," the boy replied.

Mrs. Donovan took up her knitting and went on with it in silence for a time; John took up his book and tried to read. Then he laid the volume aside and looked at Michael's mother. She wanted to speak. "The monastery has completely changed him. I can't make him out. I am sure that he is suffering a good deal, but I don't know over what."

"He was greatly disappointed about Slindon, you know," said John. "He had set his heart on remaining there."

"I know. I know. He seems to be lost in the world. He confided that much to me. It must be strange to him. But why should *we* be made strangers?"

"Michael isn't really a stranger to us, I think, Mrs. Donovan. I believe he has lost touch with his own soul. He's hankering after the priesthood."

"Well, why doesn't he go? Though I must say," she added, "that I am not very anxious to see him become a secular priest."

"I don't think it's possible to go through a novitiate and not to be marked by it for ever, Mrs. Donovan."

The old lady looked at him keenly. "And you're going too! Well, I suppose it wouldn't be worth attempting unless even the failures were crippled by it. The fact that people can't get over it must be its justification." She took up her knitting and worked several rows before speaking again. "Yet, it can't be that,

John—at least not altogether. A monastery may change one to some extent . . . but the sort of change that has come about in Michael is due to some violent emotional crisis. . . . It happened in the monastery though. He wasn't like this before he went there."

"Neither was he like this in the fortnight I spent at Slindon," John put in. "This silence and mystery have grown upon him gradually."

"Well, I can't make it out. We Irish are the victims of melancholy, John. But this isn't melancholy. Michael's always cheerful . . . it's his extreme gentleness that perplexes me."

There the matter rested, or rather there the matter was left. It remained in Mrs. Donovan's mind as a constant preoccupation. Upstairs, in his little study, with the drawer of the table pulled open ready for his manuscript to be hidden at the approach of a footstep, Michael Donovan was working at his secret task.

The whimsical gentleness upon which his mother and his friend were commenting in the drawing-room was not altogether due to the failure of his vocation at Slindon—though his novitiate had distinctly marked him. It was due to the failure of that vocation *plus* his hesitation over his next move. He felt that he could not afford to make another mistake. Several tentative approaches towards a decision had been made; each of these approaches resulted in no final decision. The shattering stroke of renunciation had been parried by the divine antagonist. He could not effect another of the same sort. Only the most delicate finesse would overcome the future. He was waiting in a mood of amused but humble intentness for the next opening. In the meanwhile, as a species of fencing practice, Michael was working at a sonnet sequence. All his

other poems had been read to Mrs. Donovan as soon as they were written. These could not be read to her. They would never be published. They contained a secret no one was able to share.

If the poet had considered the sonnet sequence upon which he was engaged in a critical spirit he probably would have admitted that it was not his finest poetic achievement. The sonnets were too intimate in their emotion to be completely effective. Their composition moved him too much; and though he labored over them with the most agonizing care they were frequently too full of dark personal allusions to be intelligible; too recondite to be an artistic success. One heart might have understood them and preferred them to all the rest of the poet's work; but from that heart they must be sealed with the seven seals of the Apocalyptic book.

Such was Michael Donovan's spiritual activity. His external actions were directed to deciding his vocation. The necessity for renunciation stood as firmly as ever. The only difficulty was how to give effect to it. To Mrs. Donovan (who remained in ignorance of the motive) this appeared an easy matter; but it was by no means so easy as it looked.

Another religious order might have taken him. A Benedictine Abbot expressed himself as willing to let Michael make a second attempt in the community over which he ruled. But Father Aldhelm and the Guardian of Slindon advised their former novice so strongly against a further monastic venture that the project was given up.

"There are men," the Guardian wrote, "who choose the wrong order first in mistake and find the right one later. But you are not one of these. With a full sense of responsibility I say that you are not fitted for the

cloister. Try, if you must, to be a secular. You won't like a seminary; all of them are deplorably inefficient and narrow; but at least in a seminary you will have more freedom than in a cloister—and after your ordination will be released from it. I don't encourage you to go on; but if you decide to do so, I will help you as much as lies in my power."

Consequently, Michael, backed by letters from the authorities at Slindon, applied to several bishops in turn, to be accepted as a diocesan student. One of these bishops told his secretary to inform the applicant that he made it a rule to accept no candidate who had tried a religious order; another replied saying that in his opinion a man of letters was better employed as a layman. This bishop distrusted "brilliant" priests; he distrusted poets still more—though he possessed just enough courtesy to keep that distrust to himself.

Once he might have been accepted. The rector of one of the Northern diocesan seminaries treated his inquiry with sympathy and arranged a meeting, appointing the presbytery of a poverty-stricken South Eastern London parish as the meeting place.

Michael was shown by a surly slatternly housekeeper into the dining-sitting room. His ardor froze upon passing the threshold. He did not know that the parish priest, whose room this was, had, before coming to this neighborhood, been in charge of a little one-horse mission in Essex or that that mission had been mainly supported by begging letters written to those co-religionists who were of sufficient importance to have their names and addresses in the *Catholic Who's Who*. He did not know that twenty begging letters had to be written a day; that five out of twenty recipients (on an average) replied; that not more than one out of five

answering letters contained any money; or that those contributions brought in a sum which if distributed over the year gave the priest an income of thirty shillings a week. Neither did Michael know that this poor suburban parish just managed to provide the priest and his housekeeper with their board and lodging, or that the clerical salary of thirty pounds per annum came out of the funds of the Cardinal-Archbishop. If he had known these facts he might have been impressed with the priestly heroism instead of the priestly taste in atrocious furniture and pictures. But he could only perceive the horsehair sofa, the gimcrack ornaments, the photographs of ecclesiastical dignitaries and the owner of all this rubbish, a fat, unshaven, old man who, at the lunch to which he invited Michael, displayed table manners that can be most adequately described by saying that they accorded with the greasy antimacassars on the back of the horsehair armchair.

The rector of the seminary, whom Michael had come to see, was more presentable—but even he was stuffy and his intellectual accomplishments seemed to be roughly on a par with those of a master at a secondary school. Had Donovan been aware of the self-sacrificing devotion of these two men, he would not have left the presbytery with such a violent disgust with secular priests in general of whom these particular priests were examples.

Gradually the edge of disgust wore off his mind. When the president of the largest and best of the English Catholic Colleges intimated his agreeableness to admitting the ex-Franciscan as a student (his letter was in answer to one written by Michael three months previously; not a signal instance of businesslike promptitude!) the question was reopened.



Though Donovan remained in doubt as to whether he would eventually enter the College, he thought it advisable not to shut the door which had just been opened for him. He would not have to commit himself by definite action until the new year, which was the date fixed for his admission to the Seminary. He had nearly six months left; for this reprieve he was grateful. So he wrote arranging to enter at the stated time, hesitating over making such a commitment, fortifying himself with the reflection that it was not irrevocable. He could not afford to make a second mistake.

There are few mental trials so painful as is indecision, and through every phase of that trial the mind of Michael Donovan passed. The sonnet sequence had been begun in order to provide a means of putting his thoughts to work in a pleasanter field. It also was invaluable as a sort of spiritual diary, an ordered consideration of his motives and emotions. Lost in his art the poet gradually forgot the seminary whose floors he was destined to tread in the new year; deciding only this much—that decision should be postponed until the last possible minute.

He envied John for his vocation almost as much as that admiring lad envied him for his gifts. John was perfectly happy, absorbingly certain that he was fulfilling the Will of God in his choice. John's reasons for going were if not clearer less complex than the reasons that had driven Michael into the friary at Shindon. Had there been no Marjorie there would have been no monastery, so far as Michael was concerned. John, on the other hand, was actuated by no impulse other than that of divine charity. He chose the religious life for its own sake, not because of fortuitous circumstances. He chose it simply because he desired

nothing else—where Michael had chosen it because he desired something else too much. John would fly to it as to a lover; Michael had fled to it from a lover. John was seeking to escape from the evil of the world; Michael had sought to escape from one dear good of the world. But his refuge had failed him and now he knew not where to turn.

### CHAPTER III

**M**ICHAEL instantly provided himself with an intervening engagement when John invited him to go to Victoria to meet Marjorie's train. Her return was something that he had longed for as much as he had dreaded it. He had not seen her for close upon two years; he had become reconciled to his loss and strong enough to support it with fortitude. The old wound was about to be reopened. There was no resistance possible to the knife—for a knife it was that must accompany her—giving pangs in direct proportion to the pleasure she would bring into his life.

Donovan would have escaped from the meeting—ardent as he was—had he been able to do so. But the fugitive had no hiding-place from the swift eyes and feet of his desire. Fear fell upon him.

He excused himself from going with John to Victoria Station. "I have arranged to go out to lunch. You go, alone. Perhaps mother would go with you. I'll be back early in the afternoon—soon after you arrive."

John wondered a little over this engagement, knowing how very rarely his friend lunched out of Edith Road, surprised that the appointment should coincide

with Marjorie's coming. He was slightly annoyed with Michael for arranging to be away that day of all days; but he did not suspect the motive at work. It was curious that so courteous a man should have forgotten to keep that date clear.

Mrs. Donovan accompanied John to the station. She was hatching a plot. Marjorie had arranged to stay at Kensington no longer than the week-end before going off with her brother for a fortnight's holiday at Dorking; but though according to the girl's programmes she should go back immediately afterwards to France, Margaret Donovan meant to persuade her to stay on for a second fortnight at Edith Road. The house had grown so quiet; Michael was moody; Marjorie's presence would do good to them all.

There had been an immediate love formed between these two kind and noble women, from the time when they had first met, briefly and only once or twice during Marjorie's last hurried holiday in England. They had written to each other frequently since then, for there was a spiritual kinship between the gentle finely-tempered old Irishwoman and the more radiant English girl. Both had the same warm-hearted humanity, the same gaiety in their religion. Mother and daughter they were, though pride of race and a difference of upbringing lay between them.

The train was due to reach Victoria at a quarter to three. That meant that Marjorie and her escort would arrive at Edith Road by a quarter past three. Michael tore himself away from his hosts at the earliest possible minute, not long, in fact, after his mother and John had left the house, and waited in a fever of torment for the return. They could not be expected for another half hour at the earliest, as the sentinel, at his post at the

window of Mrs. Donovan's bedroom, carefully calculated from his watch. Nevertheless he never absented himself from the window for more than five minutes at a stretch. A quarter past three went; twenty past; twenty-five past. Michael cursed the unpunctuality of the South Eastern Railway. The hand of his watch had traveled beyond the half hour when a taxi swerved round the eastern bend of the road.

Then, curious to relate, Michael trembled with fright. He rushed into his study; shut the door and opened a book whose print swam into an unintelligible mist before his eyes. He heard voices talking in the hall and happy laughter; but he stayed in his retreat, as still as a mouse.

"I expect Michael will be back soon, Marjorie," said his mother as she led her guest up the stairs to her room. They passed the study. Michael could not pretend to be unaware of their being there. He gripped himself tightly and stepped out on to the landing.

"Why, here's Marjorie!" he cried. "You didn't make much noise as you came in, mother."

It was done too clumsily; a little taper was lit in Margaret Donovan's soul. She smiled internally, though making no outward sign, learning much in that instant.

"When did you get in?" she asked.

"The lunch was stuffy, solid and stolid—so I left the Higginsons as soon as I could—earlier than I expected." Then turning to Marjorie, he politely inquired as to the comfort of her journey.

"She's tired, I expect," said Mrs. Donovan, answering for her. "Go back to your book, Michael. I'm taking Marjorie up to her room. She'll be down again in twenty minutes."

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They left him more at ease with himself. The shock of the impact pulled his nerves together. When he rejoined the others at tea he betrayed nothing. But Mrs. Donovan had the clue for which she had hitherto sought in vain.

John and Marjorie left for Dorling on the following Monday morning; leaving behind a Michael who was congratulating himself upon his imperturbable coolness. He knew, however, that they would be back in a fortnight's time; that Marjorie had promised Mrs. Donovan to stay on at least for another three weeks; and that his own serious testing would come then.

He had not (so he thought) given himself away; but he knew that he was more deeply entangled than ever by Marjorie's beauty. His sleeping passion had awakened, refreshed by its rest, and he had no power of resistance.

His old vow stood cold and hard as steel. Against that inexorable barrier his overpowering love raged. A drama seemed to be enacted before his eyes in which he took no personal part. The forces arrayed against one another were hardly affected by his will. They were independent of him. He merely looked on, an interested spectator. They were fighting for mastery over him, but he could hardly be said in any other sense to be concerned in the conflict.

He was conscious of his mother's gentle eye watching him anxiously. He avoided her, so confirming her suspicions, and became aware that she knew more than she should. But he could not bring himself to confide in her and grew the more dismal because of his inability to do so.

Monday and Tuesday went by drearily, and like an

evil dream. The present was bad enough; but what would happen upon Marjorie's return? He could not bear to think about it. Yet some way must be found at once to gain a support to that resolution which, so many years ago, he had sealed by a vow.

Michael remembered that Father Aldhelm, in one of his frequent letters on the subject of his ex-novice's vocation, had suggested that the case might be taken to some impartial and experienced confessor. Father Burrows, of Farm Street, was named as one whom it would be well to consult. To Father Burrows, accordingly, Michael went. The consultation should only touch the definite point of Michael's fitness for the priesthood. The question of Marjorie (however cogent it might be to the general subject) must be rigidly excluded. That was no concern of the confessor.

The Jesuit took Michael into his comfortable room—a room that without being over-luxurious contrasted strongly with the plain poor cells of Slindon—and invited him to sit in what was his softest armchair. This chair was carefully placed so as to oblige anyone who sat in it to face the window. It gave the priest the opportunity of studying the countenance of his interviewer in the light, and (as he himself sat with his back to the window) the advantage of keeping his own face in the shadow. Apart from this breach of courtesy, Father Burrows had the stereotyped good manners of the Society of Jesus.

When the priest had thus successfully manœuvred for position, and had secured the observation post to himself, he handed the cigarette box to his visitor and waited for him to begin.

Michael told him the story of his Franciscan novi-

tiate, of the reasons leading up to his leaving Slindon, of what the superiors had said and of Father Aldhelm's last letter. Then he went on to speak of his subsequent experiences, the homesickness he had found upon his return to the world. Father Burrows let him talk without interruption, except once or twice, when he asked a question. At last, after Donovan had made an end, the priest gave his own opinion.

"I should say," he said, "that your superiors would have been right. It is of course possible for superiors to make mistakes, but mistakes are not so liable to occur with them as with candidates to the religious life. You see the Guardian at Slindon and Father Aldhelm are men long accustomed to specialize, so to speak, in religious vocation; if they have told you that you have no vocation, you would not be justified in seeking admission into another order without some exceptionally clear and valid proofs that to do so is the will of God. Now, candidly, I do not see that you have those proofs. To put the matter even more strongly, I may say that I have often been accused of sending people wholesale into the cloister. If I express myself against it in your case. . . . You admit that you agreed with the superiors at Slindon?"

"I did at the time, Father," said Michael. "But I have wondered since then if I haven't a vocation after all."

"Do you feel *sure* that you have?"

"No, Father, but I want to be sure about it."

"Mr. Donovan," said the Jesuit, "this hankering after the cloister is a practically inevitable reaction after the life you have led for the past year. You feel strange in the world now. But that feeling will pass off by degrees, though you will probably regret to your

dying day that you did not have a vocation. There are hundreds of such people in England—especially among priests. They are always thinking of the cloister, but God does not always give them the vocation.”

“But don’t you think, Father, that I may have a vocation to be a secular priest?”

The Jesuit was silent for a minute, then he answered, “Mr. Donovan, I think that you have no vocation at all to that sort of thing. You can do good work as a layman, as a literary man. The Church is in great need of capable lay writers, they can often say and do what we ecclesiastics cannot. They can go where we cannot. That I think is your vocation.

“Of course gifts of that sort may be made double-edged arguments. For instance, some time ago a lady came to me who was a really fine musician, she had studied at Leipzig under one of the first men of the day. She became a Poor Clare nun. Now in her order she will never touch a piano again. The fact that she was prepared to make the sacrifice might prove her vocation—in this particular case I believe it did—but on the other hand it might be urged that since she had this gift and education she should use them in the world. *That I am convinced is the argument to apply to you.*”

He was silent again and as Michael made no remark, the Jesuit continued. Looking very closely at him, he said, in a quiet voice, “I think you should marry and have children.”

Michael was startled beyond measure, but controlled himself, with an effort not lost upon the speaker. The thrust had gone home. There was a gleam in Michael’s eye and the twitching of a smile round his lips.

He thought now that he had better complete the story, so went on to tell the patient Jesuit what there



was to tell. Of Marjorie, of how he had never given her any hint of what was in his heart, of the scruples which had tormented him concerning the religious life, of his sin and of his vow.

"My dear fellow!" cried the Jesuit, "What did your confessor say when you told him?"

"He was very angry."

"I should think so," said the Jesuit. "I agree with your confessor that the taking of that vow was utterly foolish. It was also presumptuous and you've had to suffer for it. However, that can be put right, I should think. It was only a private vow, you said?"

"Yes, Father."

"Well, I think that if you go to see the Cardinal's Vicar General and explain the circumstances to him he will give you a dispensation from it. I believe also you will find when you have become a free man once more that you will not be troubled any longer about your vocation. You only wished to escape from falling in love when you were under a vow. Go to see Bishop Roche (I will give you a letter of introduction to him) and there probably won't be much difficulty about the dispensation. But never make a vow of any sort again without first consulting a priest.

"As for the lady, wait a month and see what the state of your mind is at the end of that period. If you still want to enter the cloister when your month is up, come to see me. . . . Now I'll write the letter to the Vicar-General."

He turned to his desk and scribbled a few lines addressed to Bishop Roche, which he handed in an open envelope to Michael. "There, I hope that'll do the trick for you."

As Michael passed out of the Jesuit House in Mount

Street, he found himself in a world flooded with the August sunshine, and his heart was singing.

Mrs. Donovan was puzzled by her son's extravagant gaiety during tea. It threw her off the track, for there was nothing that could possibly account for this abrupt change. She heard him shouting out "The Spanish Ladies" chanty at the top of his voice in his study half an hour afterwards, and wondered what could have happened to restore his old hilarity in this violent fashion.

At dinner that evening he asked her whether she would mind his going away for a few days.

"Oh, not at all." She was a little hurt by his secrecy, even in such a genial mood, but hid her wound.

"You want to know where I am going, mother?" he added a moment later.

"Well, you *have* kept rather to yourself lately, my boy," she answered.

"I know, I know," Michael came round to her and sat on the arm of her chair perilously. "There's no secret about it. I'd like to go out for a few days' walking tour."

"What's the reason?" Mrs. Donovan inquired.

"A very simple one. I've not been myself for some time. I've been moping about the house. A long tramp through the country will do me good. That's all."

Michael's mother knew that that was *not* all—but she did not press him to tell her more. She knew him too well to worry about his whims and a walking tour was a common way her son had often adopted when he wanted to get fresh ideas after a sterile period. She was relieved by the return of a familiar mood; so that when he set out next morning with a knapsack on his

shoulder, a thick stick in his hand, and (what she did not see) the uncompleted manuscript book containing the sonnet sequence in his pocket, Margaret Donovan let him go with a lighter heart than had been hers since Michael had left Slindon. He waved to her from the corner of the road, turned round it and was gone.

A train took him to Croydon; his legs carried him on to Coulsdon and a farmer's cart carried for about another four miles, at the end of which he walked on to Guildford. Here he stayed the night, sleeping snugly after a quart of excellent beer, in an inn.

The next day, hard walking brought him into Haslemere. Again an inn, whose host considerably overcharged the bill, sheltered his tired bones and happy heart.

Then the traveler left the main road, and, making slightly north again, crossed Hindhead and climbed up the great wooded hills that stand around the Devil's Punch Bowl.

He had been living a hearty, healthy, animal life, thinking if at all when upon the road only of how far off it was to the next pub; limping a little towards nightfall; sleeping in absolute unconsciousness each night. But here was a solitude unlike the loneliness that he had experienced for so many months. Not the bitter loneliness of an aching brain, shut in between the walls of a study, but the sweet loneliness of a soul set free upon the earth.

It was good to sit on the heather, under the barely sufficient shelter provided against the hot sun by a clump of young trees. It was better to eat ham sandwiches from a paper parcel and to drink from a flask. It was best of all to lie in plenary contentment upon

one's back and to smoke slowly to the last shred of tobacco in the pipe's bowl. This was supreme excellence and the consummation of material enjoyment.

He drew his manuscript book from his pocket, and looked at it for the first time since he left London. It had gone on, getting longer and more discursive. Several times he had altered the arrangement of the various items in attempts to bring the whole to a logical termination, but without being able to round the sequence off.

The mechanical arrangement now suddenly became obvious; for a new fact had entered in that supplied a plan. "That won't do," Michael murmured to himself, striking through one sonnet and then, turning forward a few pages, a second and a third sonnet. "Here the whole thing is altered now or will be when I have wound it up."

Then, sitting on the high slope of the hill, above the abysmal valley and over against the western range where the sun was beginning to sink, Michael wrote—not without corrections—but ultimately.

# BEAUTY.

## I.

### (Relative)

How many are the forms that beauty shows;  
 To what dim shrines of sweet, forgotten art  
 She calls; on what wide seas her strong wind blows  
 The proud and perilous passion of the heart!  
 How many are the forms of her decay;  
 The blood that stains the dying of the sun,  
 The love and loveliness that pass away  
 Like roses' petals scattered one by one.

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But there shall issue through the ivory gate  
Amid a mist of dreams, one dream-come-true,  
Beauty immortal, mighty of estate,  
The beauty that a poet loved in you;  
The goodness God has set as aureole  
Upon the naked meekness of your soul.

II.

(Absolute).

Who shall take Beauty in her citadel?  
Her gates will splinter not to battering days;  
Her slender spires can bear the onslaught well.  
Shall any track her through her secret ways  
To snare the pinions of the golden bird?  
A feather falling through the jeweled air,  
Only the echo of a lovely word—  
Nowhere her being is, and everywhere.

But one may come at last through many woes  
And pain and hunger to his resting place,  
The watered garden of the Mystic Rose,  
The contemplation of the Bruised Face—  
The quest of all his wild, adventurous pride;  
And, seeing Beauty, shall be satisfied.

CHAPTER IV

**M**ICHAEL grew very impatient for the month of waiting recommended by Father Burrows to end. The Jesuit had lifted a weight off his mind, but it was as much as could be done not to display the deep, new-found joy to all the world.

There was however an exceedingly bad moment when Michael, upon his return to London, went to see Bishop

Roche, the Vicar-General. He had been shown into a waiting room at the Archbishop's house at Westminster while Father Burrows' letter was taken up. Ten minutes later the Vicar-General, an old benign Irishman, shuffled into the room, and after Michael had kissed his ring asked him to explain the whole circumstances under which he was seeking for a dispensation.

Michael's scruples had vanished during his walking tour, and he said plainly that he wanted to get married. Bishop Roche grunted. "Huh! I don't know whether it's a vow I have the power of dispensing. You may have to go to Rome for that. But wait here a minute," and the old man shuffled out of the room again. He seemed an intolerably long time in returning, for Michael was eager to hear his fate.

Even in his impatience Michael felt how grotesque was this ending to a heroic refusal. An old man, tottering out of the room to find out if he had the necessary faculty of dispensation! It seemed odd to think that those fumbling uncertain fingers could break a chain of steel, and that the attempt was being made so professionally, so unromantically.

At last the slippers were heard, dragging slowly along the corridor, and the Vicar-General re-entered the room. He seemed quite stolid about it all. "Sit down," he said. "Well, I am able to do it. You know, of course, that all this is at my own discretion? That I can refuse to dispense you?"

"Yes, my lord," Michael answered humbly.

"I'm not telling you that to frighten you or to impress you with my own importance. But I want you to realize if I release you from your obligation that your obligation was serious; and that unless I release you, you will be strictly bound by it to your dying day."

"I took it quite seriously. I quite realize its gravity, my lord."

The Bishop looked sharply at his visitor and apparently was satisfied by the scrutiny. "I suppose you know that you did a foolish thing?"

Michael smiled. "Everybody tells me that."

"Who's everybody? You don't go about talking of your vow to all your acquaintances surely?"

Michael smiled no longer. The interview was growing uncomfortable. "I've spoken to no one except to my confessor, and Father Burrows and you, my lord."

"Ughm!" grunted the Vicar-General. "I think you've suffered enough for your folly. Mind, it's only because you took this vow without authorization—for no priest would have sanctioned it—that I have any inclination to let you off. . . . Let us be quite clear on the point. It was only a private vow that you took on your own initiative? You were not professed with the Franciscans?"

"No, my lord," Michael replied, growing hopeful again.

The Bishop eyed his petitioner steadily and thoughtfully for a few seconds, before speaking.

"Well, I will dispense you from it. But in order that you may do something to make up for the vow, I will lay upon you the obligation of going to Confession and of receiving Holy Communion once a week. You understand! That is the condition on which I dispense you."

"I understand perfectly, my lord," Michael replied. He was so thankful to have gained what he sought that he would willingly have accepted an even heavier commutation. For years he had been in the habit of doing as much as the Bishop laid upon him, and even more;

so there was no fresh burden. However, he shrewdly refrained from telling the Vicar-General that and left the Archbishop's House with intense satisfaction. He had been let down very lightly. Thank God for bishops!

Michael walked up Ashley Place in great elation, and reaching the Cathedral entrance, went into the building and knelt for ten minutes before the Blessed Sacrament Altar. God had been marvelously good to him, and simply and humbly Michael poured his heart out there before the Divine Presence, consecrating his love to Him from Whom it had come. There was no doubt in his mind now, absolutely none.

The first impulse was to go straight to Marjorie as soon as she got back from Dorking—she would in a couple of days. This Michael sternly suppressed; he felt it would not be playing the game. He was acting under Father Burrows' direction, testing and proving his vocation according to his advice, and by his aid had obtained the dispensation from the bishop. Now that he possessed it and was a free man—free for Marjorie!—he ought in decency to fulfill the rest of the plan and wait the prescribed time. Yet it was not easy to keep silence and to make no sign. A great gaiety shone in his eye now, but otherwise he tried to be the same man.

Well, he would discipline his soul to patience. A month let it be, but no longer. Michael counted the days, marking them off upon a special calendar he drew upon a sheet of cardboard of his period of probation, August 10th when he spoke to Father Burrows, to September 10th, when he would be free for Marjorie. The date, September the 10th, he surrounded with a thick circle of red ink. A day or two afterwards (the day of John and Marjorie's return) the circle was gilded.



At Dorking, it transpired, upon the holiday makers' return, there had been running the fire of argument from which Catholics are never exempt in strictly Protestant households—especially when those households contain relatives or friends.

Aunt Agnes still wore a gray dress similar to the one she used to wear, and her "Mispah" brooch. Aunt Angela also retained *her* "Mispah" and an undiminished authority over her sister. But somehow they seemed less terrible now than they had when John and Marjorie were children.

Their forgiveness was perhaps not made more gracious by the fact that it obviously sprang from the grace of being able to exercise Christian charity towards scapegraces. Yet it was an improvement upon their former unbending disapproval. The forgiveness that seemed so awkward, was only awkward because Aunt Angela was not quite sure how one could reconcile kindness towards souls deluded by Rome with fidelity to her own Protestant principles. As for Aunt Agnes, her awkwardness arose from her fear of being sharply reprimanded for spiritual laxity by the self-constituted keeper of her conscience.

The Storer's' sectarian stiffness speedily had worn off, after which they did their best to make their visitors' stay enjoyable; and at the bottom of their crabbed but by no means cold hearts were favorably impressed with their nephew and niece. In fact Miss Angela Storer delivered herself of a pronouncement (in the style and tone of an *ex cathedra* declaration) to the effect that John and Marjorie were not real Catholics. "They are far too intelligent," was Aunt Angela's opinion, "to hold all the superstitious beliefs of other Roman Catholics."

Their defection from Protestantism was attributed to the baleful influence of the Donovans, "who," said the elder sister, "are probably Jesuits in disguise." Yet even towards the Donovans the Storers extended a tentative indulgence, and came up to town for the express purpose of making their acquaintance.

These doings were as ripples upon the surface to the deep and strong current of Michael's love. The Storers came and went—all that the lover cared about was that the days should go by quickly.

As he neared the end, some doubt and diffidence fell upon him. What if Marjorie should refuse him? He was obliged to admit that there was no reason for supposing that she was in love with him. This, however, was no more than a fugitive mood, for with the optimism of the lover, he believed that ultimately whatever trials and difficulties lurked in ambush, Marjorie must yield to his love.

There remained the ordeal of making the confession. It would have been so much easier to have done it any one of a score of times during the month on impulse. Once she was showing him a book in the dining room, and as their heads bent over the page, the glory of her hair brushed against his cheek, and he thrilled at the touch and all but spoke then. When the time actually arrived he might not have so good an opportunity, or perhaps find that a determined occasion made his words sound formal and stilted. Though gaiety was his dominant emotion, there were painful reactions of anxiety following upon suppressed excitement.

One thing was clear enough, his scruples had entirely vanished. The Franciscans and the Jesuits were agreed, and his own soul was convinced. The Providence of God seemed to be working throughout the

whole matter, and the puzzle of his life receiving its solution.

And now there had come another strong external proof of his vocation—(it came long before the expiration of the month, as if to reassure his confidence)—Michael was offered the editorship of a weekly review, the *Recorder*. Here was his “job” put straight into his hands, thrust upon him. It gave him at once his work to do in the world and it settled so many matters applying to himself and Marjorie. There could no longer be any doubt. God had written “This is the way: go ye in it.” Whatever happened about Marjorie, this at least was clear, he must obey the so-plainly-indicated vocation.

On the morning of the last of his thirty days, Michael went with John to the half-past seven o’clock Mass at the Pro Cathedral in Kensington and to communion. Very humbly he received his Lord, begging His grace and guidance, thanking Him for the manifestation of His mercy. The two men walked back to Edith Road arriving long after the ladies had finished breakfast, very hungry and happy. Marjorie helped Michael to porridge while Mrs. Donovan went out into the kitchen to see that the cook prepared fresh tea for her son. John had bolted down his food, as he was due to leave for the office. Everyone was out of the way; should it be done now? Michael roared with laughter at the thought of proposing to Marjorie over empty egg shells and slops of tea, with his own plate piled with porridge, while ham and eggs frizzled in the kitchen for him.

Marjorie looked up from a letter that she had been reading at the other end of the table. “What’s the joke, Michael?”

"That laugh," he said, "was the fruit of a very profound meditation upon the unfathomable humor of the universe."

"Was that all?" and Marjorie resumed her unfinished letter.

That day was one of wild excitement for Michael Donovan. He walked up and down his room after lunch (the morning having found Marjorie engaged with Mrs. Donovan), and when the afternoon was proposed as a shopping expedition for the two ladies, Michael was obliged to call himself an ass. Things couldn't be rushed like this. Love was not bound by the clock. Michael laughed again at himself and the world—he hadn't been able to do that at Slindon if the Father Guardian were to be believed—and continuing his meditations on universal humor, took the train to Richmond Park where he walked all the afternoon.

He arrived back at Edith Road at five o'clock, quiet, somewhat exhausted by the ardors and adventures of the day. The most sensible plan, he decided, was to wait until he could find a propitious hour and the right mood—one not easy to find, it appeared, for they all had been asked to go down the next day to Dorking for Agnes Storer's birthday.

Michael was annoyed at the thwarting circumstances. He had not, however, long to wait, for that evening a letter came from the Franciscan Provincial making an appointment for the postulant on Saturday afternoon. John threw the letter across to his sister, saying:

"That's spoilt our little trip to Dorking, Marjorie."

Marjorie read the Provincial's letter, then she said, "Aunt Agnes will be awfully disappointed, and I don't at all know when we shall be able to go again. I

must go back to France on Monday. I suppose you can't put the Provincial off?"

"I don't think I can," he replied. "You see he may be engaged all Sunday or be leaving town then. He doesn't give me any alternative. I must go, I am afraid."

"Well, I think *I'd* better go to Dorking anyway. Would you come with me, Michael?"

Mrs. Donovan had already written to Agnes Storer apologizing for her inability to go with the others on Saturday, and now that John also had suddenly to drop out, a very depleted party, only Michael and Marjorie, would be left.

When Marjorie asked, "Would you come with me, Michael?" Michael hoped that nobody would hear how loudly his heart beat at the question. Not even Mrs. Donovan heard those hammer strokes; but she did catch sight for a moment of a little dancing elf of joy in his eye, and so, though she had been on the point of saying that she would go with them after all, so as not to disappoint the Miss Storer, she determined that her indisposition should last over the next few days.

When Marjorie asked, "Are you sure you will not be well enough to come, Mrs. Donovan?" the old lady's mouth twitched in the slightest ironic smile as she answered, "No, my dear, it's out of the question. But you and Michael can go." Michael held his breath while waiting for his mother's reply, and then immediately felt ashamed at his relief when she had made known her decision. Mrs. Donovan understood this perfectly, but accepted the minute stab for the sake of the great joy she hoped it would mean.

Michael played his hand with cool dexterity, for not until the next day at lunch did he suggest that instead

of going straight down to Dorking, Marjorie and he should spend the morning and afternoon upon the Surrey Downs, and then arrive at Dorking for tea. Marjorie clapped her hands at the proposal, and Mrs. Donovan was of the opinion that it would be delightful and would do them both good to get a long walk upon the hills. Marjorie was genuinely pleased at the prospect of so jolly a day, but did not display any emotion other than simple pleasure while cutting up sandwiches for the excursion. Michael experienced thrills of anticipation alternating with agonies of apprehension. This was *the* great day of his life, and yet its tokens would only be prosaic stuff, a couple of railway tickets and a paper parcel of sandwiches!

There was a familiar walk that Michael knew. He took tickets at Victoria for Moorhurst where they got out and made up across gently sloping fields and along lanes rich with the colors of autumn to Coldharbour. A path rose stiffly up from the side of the village and branching off the road on to the downs; a clear ridge lay above. They did not, however, yet strike along those friendly hills, for a fine rain had begun to fall and a healthy hunger was upon them. So upon Michael's assurance that at Leith Hill they would be able to find food, they went into the "Anchor" at Coldharbour where they unpacked their sandwiches in the tap room. Then Michael ordered beer, glad that Marjorie took a glass to set against his own mighty tankard. The sandwiches soon disappeared, "gobbled up greedily, Michael," said Marjorie, "just as if we were children at a school treat. We've eaten our lunch at breakfast!"

"But that's the proper way," answered Michael. "We cease to be respectable people up here! What

would your aunts say if they say you in a pub? Supposing they took it into their heads to walk out here! You know we passed through Dorking on our way down. It was only one station before Holmwood,”

Marjorie laughed merrily. “Wouldn’t it be a joke if they did—but dreadful for me! They’d have it against me to my dying day. It would all be put down to the pernicious doctrines of the Romish Church!”

They threw the paper and string of the parcel into the grate and went out into the village street. The rain was still falling, a very fine but persistent rain, which did not penetrate the thin coats they wore. They clambered up the steep cliffs of chalk on to the plateau and made for Leith Hill. The yellow blossoms of the gorse had gone, but the delicate purple of ling was everywhere. A sprig of this they cut off and Marjorie wore it on her breast, where it lay a royal note, a splash of gay color upon the gray of her tweed coat.

“At this spot,” said Michael, standing still on the summit, “very great liars say they can see the sea. My eyes are pretty good and I’ve never managed to do that. But certainly Chanctonbury Ring can be seen from here and that’s a good distance.”

On this day, however, only the nearer hills could be seen through the misty atmosphere, and even this little was gradually being blotted away by the curtain of rain. Yet there were compensations—as if Michael needed anything more than the warm happiness in his heart! For they came to pine woods where the transparent scarlet of the fairy lanterns hung in clusters on every bough, and where there were countless miracles of spiders’ webs. These, unbroken by the soft tender drizzle, were full of water, woven diagrams of strung diamonds, such as men rarely find quite intact. Gossamer

was upon every bush and hedge made into chain armor of glass and silver. The weather amply compensated them for itself.

It would not have been easy to find the way had not Michael known every inch of that ground, for even the tower of Leith Hill only rose up suddenly and when they were upon it. Here was a woman who sold buns and ginger beer, looking very miserable in the wet, sitting under her umbrella, despairingly waiting for customers. Michael bought a bag of rock cakes, but refused the proffered "fizz"—because, as he said, "they give us beer in the pub below."

To this pub they scrambled down the almost sheer side of hill, Michael in advance, making the descent secure with the stick in his left hand while with his right he steadied Marjorie. Very carefully he dug his ash into the chalk at every foot, for the way was shut out impenetrably as by fog, and at this spot a friend of Michael's two years ago had slipped, spraining his ankle. It would never do for that to happen to Marjorie. With muddy boots and torn clothing, and gasps after their exertion they reached the inn at the foot of the hill. Their appetite did justice to plates of cold beef and potatoes and of blackberry tart, but their thirst grumbled at the absence of beer, the deception of the inns of the Surrey Trust. Tea had to suffice.

After lunch, the rain having lifted its curtain, Michael filled and lit his pipe, and they turned towards Dorking following now a smooth even road between deep woods. Here, too, hung the fairy lanterns on every side, and the spider's webs winking and glimmering in the growing light.

Then Michael suggested a rest, and going into the edge of the wood they found a dry log under a broad



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tree. The time had come. Very white and trembling Michael began, "Marjorie, there is something I want to tell you."

It seemed to him banal to begin in this way, but something in the tone of his voice made Marjorie catch her breath. She had more control of herself, however, than had the man, and faltered, after a pause, "Well Michael?"

He scratched with his walking stick among the dead leaves at their feet, feeling excessively foolish. Suddenly he swung round.

"Marjorie, Marjorie, can't you guess? I love you more than anything on earth." He did not know what else to say and Marjorie made no reply. Silence fell between them. The scratching was resumed.

The girl had never pitied herself. She had treasured one look from those eyes now averted, as were her own; she had been proud of that proud signal; she had given her lover freely to God. She knew nothing of his story at Slindon, and knew that Mrs. Donovan knew nothing, except that her son was still proposing to be a priest. As a priest she always thought of him and faithfully respected what she considered to be his vocation. His words struck her dumb with surprise.

"Marjorie," he said at last, "I have told you that I love you."

"I know you do," she stammered.

"Before I told you?"

"Yes, I knew it at the moment you said good-by to me before going to your monastery."

"Good God!" he cried. "Did you know how near I was to telling you? How I had to struggle with myself? Do you know how I have wanted you ever since I saw you first?"

"I knew it," Marjorie replied, "only at the last minute. . . . I guessed. . . . I hoped before. . . . I only *knew* then. But you are going to be a priest. Why have you told me?"

"Tell me, do you love me?" was all he said, torturing her by the inquisition.

She turned away and began to cry; "I do. I do," came the words in gasps through her tears.

She drew her hand away very gently. "Michael, I dare not rob God of you. I was so proud to know that you loved me—and almost prouder because you went to your monastery. . . . You mustn't——" she broke off. "I always thought——" again she sobbed.

Then Michael himself broke down; this hard, imperious soul, rigorous with himself and with others. "Listen, Marjorie, I did not mean to tell you this, but it is forced from me. I went to Slindon thinking I might have a vocation—though I am convinced now that I never had one for the monastic state. But the *reason* I went was because there was a great sin in my life, and in the flood of my compunction I took a vow never to marry. I never thought of the cloister—but when I fell in love with you I fled to it as my refuge. That is the sort of coward I am! I did not mean to tell you, Marjorie. I should not have dared to speak to you—a vile thing like me!"

Marjorie turned round, her face swimming with tears, full of sorrow and tenderness.

"I took a vow over six years ago, as a penance. The moment it grew hard to keep, I nearly broke it. I just managed to muster up sufficient strength to run away to Slindon. If they would have let me stay, I'd be there still. . . . When I came out I felt the necessity of a public profession of celibacy. . . . The bishop

has taken it off me now. I'm free. Probably I could have been released then, but I didn't know."

"I'm glad you didn't know, Michael," she said. "It gave you a chance of proving your manhood. Michael, Michael, my dear," she was crying softly upon his breast and his arms went around her.

"My darling, do you mean that you can marry me—after what I have told you?"

Marjorie held closely to him, maternal in consolation. "Michael, my Michael. Don't go on, my heart will break! God has long ago forgiven you—oh, my darling, my darling!"

There was between them the very ecstasy of humility on one side and of noble pride and pardon upon the other, for the breaking of barriers had been complete. There was something definite and final in love like this, an almost sacramental value. Their tears had washed their souls as certainly as this fine rain had made the earth fresh and fragrant.

"You love me, Marjorie?"

"Michael, my darling, I do, I do," she cried softly.

"Michael, will you promise me something?"

"Anything, dearest."

"Well, then," she said, "never reproach yourself again."

"But I must, Marjorie. You don't know what a wretch I feel before this love of yours—you wonderful Marjorie!"

"No, but you mustn't feel that any more. The Michael of whom I am so proud!"

"Marjorie," he said at last. "I think there was never a love like ours—or any one like Marjorie. I shall never get over that feeling of amazement at your love, my darling."

She bent down and kissed his hand. "See the homage *I pay!*"

"And see the homage that *I pay!*" he repeated exultantly. And Michael kissed her lips for the first time—again marveling at his audacity.

But even lovers are subject to material things, and these came upon them in the form of long, burdened spurts of water, percolating through the interstices of the tree. They couldn't stop there, and yet it was impossible to take the road. They found a pine sweeping the ground with long trailing arms; under it they climbed on hands and feet, Michael breaking branches to make an entrance for Marjorie. They crawled under this complete natural tent, and sat leaning against the trunk, safe and dry upon a thick warm carpet of fallen needles. Not even this rain could penetrate there. Michael took out his watch, it was a quarter past three. "Goodness knows when we shall get to Dorking," said Marjorie. "What will they say when we arrive dripping wet—and engaged! Michael, am I very untidy?"

"Untidy, you feminine woman? You are adorable!"

"Well, anyhow, I'm going to show that I'm at home here," and she took off her hat and hung it upon a broken branch for a peg.

"It looks quite domesticated, a very primitive, barbarous domesticity, I grant you. A wigwam, a squaw and a pipe of peace." He pulled out his pipe.

"Let me fill it; that will be the first thing I shall do for you, Michael."

"The first!" he cried. "Oh, Marjorie—what haven't you done for me to-day—you wonderful being!"

She smiled and taking the pipe filled and lit it efficiently.

"I shan't allow you to be the superior person,

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Michael," she said, "I have lit John's for him many a time. You don't know what I can't do! Why, I shaved him once—and only gave him two very small cuts!"

Michael put his arms round her and she laid that face with its glory of hair against his head. It seemed as if life had given them its crown of beatitude in these clean and dripping woods where no living thing stirred across the squidgy autumn leaves. All the joy which God had given to his song, all the strength and pride of his heart, all its beauty and tenderness seemed to be rounded and made complete by his love for Marjorie. They neither of them talked, for they were rapt in a happy mist of dreams.

At last the renewed glint of sun from the road reminded these two absurdly happy persons that they had to get to Dorking, still four miles away, and that nearly an hour had passed since Michael had looked at his watch. They arose with reluctance and awkwardly; and set out to finish their journey.

A very bedraggled Marjorie trailed mud and pine needles and rain water into her aunts' house at Dorking. "Poor Aunt Agnes," she said kissing her, "you must have thought we were never coming. . . . Many happy returns of the day. . . . You got John's card, saying he had to go off to-day? Michael and I came alone and went for a walk on the Downs, and got nearly drowned."

Here Angela Storer came out from her bedroom on the landing. Marjorie called to her from the hall. "Quick! I've something wonderful to tell you both."

"Well, get your things off first," said the practical Agnes, as her sister ran downstairs.


"No, I'm going to tell you first, and afterwards get my things off and eat an enormous tea, with crumpets and an egg for me and two eggs for Michael." Marjorie's courage failed her. "You tell them, Michael," she said. But Michael was incapable of blurting out the news so unceremoniously, so Marjorie had to whisper it in her aunts' ears after all.

The Storers were really pleased at the announcement, for they were willing by now to go almost any lengths towards conciliation. They liked the Donovans and had sagaciously predicted that Michael and Marjorie would fall in love with one another, and there is no satisfaction like finding your own prophecy come true. The news of the editorship of the *Recorder* moreover had raised Michael from the status of a minor poet to that of a publicist. And deeper than all this, they were, despite their narrow creed and the years of misunderstanding and estrangement, human underneath their hard exterior crusts.

Aunt Agnes bustled them upstairs, finding an old dress of Marjorie's for her to wear, and a set of John's cricket flannels and an overcoat for Michael. When they went down to the dining room, quaintly garbed in clothes in each case rather too small, there were the eggs and crumpets and a tin of sardines, and marrow jam laid before a friendly fire. Even the solemn text "Thou God seest me" hung over the sideboard looked friendly in the twilight, where the coals were glowing red, and delight was leaping in four hearts. If only John and Mrs. Donovan were here to join in it.

For their sakes the maid was dispatched with a telegram—

"Arrived at Dorking wet through back to-morrow Marjorie and I engaged hurrah Michael."



## CHAPTER V

THE upshot of John Bradley's visit to the Franciscan Provincial at Forest Gate was that he was to be prepared to commence his novitiate at Slindon in seven weeks' time. This was an additional reason for the marriage of Michael and Marjorie being given as early a date as possible, so that John could be present and (every one bubbled with laughter at the thought!) give away his sister. Then, too, the sooner the *Recorder* could be taken over the better and that could hardly be done until the marriage and the honeymoon were over.

Even apart from these practical reasons for urgency there was no reason for delay; Michael and Marjorie completely trusted and loved one another, and believed not at all in the timorous folly of a long engagement. Moreover, none of their circumstances operated against immediate marriage, which had material sufficiency and health and the unqualified approval of all concerned to spur it on.

Bustle ruled supreme. John in a state of minor importance getting together pajamas and shirts and the unfamiliar underwear that would go with the monastic habit, ticking off each item on the long list of necessary articles supplied him by the Procurator of the Franciscans; Marjorie and Michael in a bustle of greater magnitude and of wilder excitement.

The first point was the house. They both were decided against living in London, and as Michael would be able to stay out of town from Thursday, when the *Recorder* came out, until Monday morning, they fixed upon a cottage in Cobham, by the bridge and looking over the river towards the church. They would be

able to hear from their garden the sough of the river on gusty evenings and the wind passing among the tall reeds and the trees.

They hit on the cottage almost at once and were so pleased with their discovery that they went no further. Here, with a little garden in front and a winding pavement of flat stones leading from the gate to the door and at the back half an acre of fruit trees and roses, stood a sturdy gray stone building that had once been part of the village inn. The large front living-room, into which one stepped straight from the open without the intermediate "passage" or "hall," had been once the tap room. Upon these very flags jolly Surrey rustics had trod; into that gigantic open fireplace had perhaps fallen betimes, when in their cups. How much mirth and good fellowship had that room known, with a circle of men sitting round the glowing logs, drinking cider and ale.

At the back of this room was another, floored with red tiles and meeting with Marjorie's critical approval. This should be the kitchen; overhead three rooms completed the cottage. The largest of these—none were very large—would be their bedroom; the next in size serve as a little study for Michael, where he could sit hacking the Government to pieces with incisive sentences or composing sonnets and lyrics; the third and last room was small and very low where the roof sloped down. Yet this with a bed in one corner, a tiny dressing-table at the window and a wash-stand in the corner would do for the entertainment of Maurice or House or whichever of their friends penetrated to this retreat. The cottage, with its ridiculous rent of eight shillings a week, seemed to both of the lovers perfectly to fit their needs. Marjorie declared that she would have no serv-



ant at present. She insisted upon running her own house with the help of one of the women of the village.

Then came the delights of furnishing, which Michael wisely left in the main to Marjorie. It was astonishing what she, with the advice of Mrs. Donovan, and her own good taste and shrewdness, was able to do with a couple of hundred pounds. Every day the two ladies went out and purchased furniture or glassware or crockery, and took Michael down now and then to the cottage to admire their skill and to rejoice in the progress of his home.

Then there was the mystery of household linen and of Marjorie's *trousseau* in which Michael was allowed to participate to a very limited extent indeed; but as those who understood the matters appeared to be entirely satisfied, there could be no doubt that their appreciation was warranted.

At last everything was ready, and on the seventeenth of October Marjorie and Michael stood before the priest at the altar rails of the Pro-Cathedral in Kensington. The whole matter went off with no sort of a hitch, for even Aunt Angela and Aunt Agnes swallowed the camel of their prejudices in order to strain out the gnat of an unfriendly temper. For the first time in their lives they entered (not without several involuntary shudders) a Catholic Church. Maurice Cregan, very debonair and prosperous in appearance, made a highly efficient best man, and John, much to the mingled amusement and delight of the bride and bridegroom, gave his sister away.

When the returning company had duly admired the wedding presents, contributed almost entirely by themselves—the piano given by the Crechets was already installed at the cottage in Cobham—luncheon came

with speeches and much merriment, and not a few jests appropriate to the occasion. Then a taxi whirled away Mr. and Mrs. Michael Donovan, brave and radiant and handsome, to the beginning of the honeymoon.

Madame Crechet, who came over to England for the wedding, and the Misses Storer sentimentalized somewhat unsuccessfully with the old Irishwoman whose dear hopes were now fulfilled, while Monsieur Crechet drank wine and House and John whiskey in the room that Michael had used as his study. So the day drawled away as such days will, with festivities becoming more solemn and dreary at every half-hour, until the invited guests with the traditional congratulations and benedictions went out and were in turn swallowed up by the night.

As Michael looked out over the blue waters of the English Channel where they mingled with the Atlantic, while Marjorie sat by his side upon the iron-gray cliffs, he felt as if he had just been rescued from those wild, wide seas; as if he now touched on solid ground for the first time. He had come to an ending, to peace, a harbor and repose.

But endings imply new beginnings. Death is the door into life; and even the burning of heaven and earth like a scroll—foretold by the seer of Patmos—is the burning of rubbish as a preliminary to a rebuilding. "The old things are passed away; behold I make all things new."

During those days that held the sweet and tender beginnings of their married life, the lovers shared, according to their capacity, that levity which is the secret of the universe. There are some matters too serious to be taken seriously; some matters too sacred not to

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be the subject of jest. Every sensible man performs all his most important actions thoughtlessly. He goes to a war or to his own wedding in a mood that can almost be called absent-minded; for if he thought about these affairs definitely it would be impossible for him to retain his sanity. Because they matter so much he must treat them as if they did not matter in the least. He can only bear his responsibilities by being irresponsible.

Everything of any consequence must be carried out light-heartedly. When an empire falls depend upon it that the fall is not due to organized conspiracy. Empires are pulled down on impulse, as casually as a child knocks down a tower of wooden bricks. Solemn prigs do not know this; that is why no prig can accomplish anything—they are thwarted at every turn by their sense of the gravity of the situation.

It is very much to be doubted whether love—romantic love—can ever come except at first sight. So it had been that Michael and Marjorie had loved each other—though not for two years was the signal of a man saying his desolate farewells upon the pavement of a London street answered as it was eventually answered. In between had come complexities, noble but futile strivings. Wanderings were finished; they now knew and were grateful for

"This bold sea-faring gently come to rest  
Amid a haven of bells and quiet waters."

Their souls had made together that awful gesture that fixes its attitude irrevocably. They were bound by love; and having accepted its lordship with their wills, were no longer free. What they had done could never be undone. The past was at an end.

There were moments when Michael marveled at his own courage, moments when fear fell upon him because of his presumptuous daring. Reckless of danger he had taken the heavens by storm; but now that the citadel was his by conquest, the laurel on his brows hurt like a crown of thorns. It was not merely that his rashness was blasphemous; he was like a man who had taken an archangel prisoner and who was at a complete loss what to do with his captive. He ought to feel a hero—instead he felt a fool. There was an element of the ironic in the surrender that Marjorie had made, for it was a tragedy so tremendous that one was obliged to salute it with laughter.

Marjorie was unconscious of the mystical humility of her husband's mind. She had given herself to him proudly and had taken him with joy. She was singing now as they sat at the edge of the cliffs, for gladness at the lover by her side.

The song finished on a little trilling note and Michael said, "Well, darling, you've been and gone and done it now."

She looked up at him, from beneath the broad brim of her hat.

"Been and gone and done what. Michael? Was I singing out of tune?"

"No, but you've married me."

She looked at him with a look full of amusement and pity. "Well, why shouldn't I marry you—when I've been loving you so long?"

He answered abstractedly, "Love's so big."

"Of course," she answered, "and so frightfully risky and exciting. . . . that's why I married you."

"Do you know, darling, that I get terrified at times."

Mrs. Michael Donovan smiled broadly. "You dear

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old Michael. I'd never have known it if you hadn't told me!"

He laughed at her and at himself. Enough of the philosopher was in him to make the poet tremble at the lover's discoveries. But the philosopher was fortunately overborne on most occasions. It was the philosopher who answered now through the lips of the lover. "Marjorie, you are my darling but also my paradox . . . I couldn't love you so much had I less compunction . . . I couldn't love you at all if there was the remotest likelihood of getting used to you—if there wasn't an unattainable thing beyond my grasp."

He smoked dreamily and without speaking again, and Marjorie lay flat on her back and pulled her wide hat over her face. The air and the exercise had made her a little drowsy. She dropped off to sleep.

They had just come from a gigantic breakfast following after a bath in the sea which, in this tiny Cornish fishing village where tents or boxes were unheard of, was entered off a deserted beach from the cave that had to serve as their dressing-room. Their exertion, their hearty and satisfied appetites, and the warm air had combined to send Marjorie off at once into a light slumber, not observed at first by her abstracted husband.

While she lay there the poet took up what the lover had begun. Drawing his fountain pen from one pocket and an old envelope from another, Michael wrote a lyric which came to him in unpremeditated spontaneity. The lines followed each other so quickly that they were all finished and rounded off in twenty minutes, in time for Marjorie to read when she awoke.

Michael was dating his verses, according to his

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custom, when his wife's eyes opened inside his wife's hat and the wife herself, having yawned (under the shelter of the hat), sat up.

"Would you like to hear something?" he said, hiding the envelope hurriedly.

"If they're verses I'd like to hear them very much, darling," was her answer.

"You've guessed right. Well, listen," and in that monotonous sing-song which poets usually adopt as the vocal medium of poetry, Michael chanted rather than read his lyric:

### *"DESIDERA VI."*

Lest, tortured by the world's strong sin,  
Her little bruised heart should die—  
Give her your heart to shelter in,  
O earth and sky!

Kneel, sun, to clothe her round about  
With rays to keep her body warm;  
And, kind moon, shut the shadows out  
That work her harm.

Yes, even shield her from my will's  
Wild folly—hold her safe and close—  
For my rough hand, in touching, spills  
Life from the rose.

But teach me too, that I may learn  
Your passion classical and cool;  
To me, who tremble so and burn,  
Be pitiful."

In her ecstasy of delight Marjorie threw her arms round her husband and subjected him to a vigorous hug. He was more pleased with this downright way

of receiving his art, than he had ever been by other artistic appreciation—though for Michael Donovan, as for all poets, the pleasure of being appreciated was only a shade less than the pleasure of creation itself.

“Marjorie—I feel such an idiot at times when I am trying to tell you how much I love you. In prose I must eternally conjugate *amo*. I cannot get beyond that.”

“But I don’t want you to!” she declared.

“Oh, there’s much more to say than that,” he replied. “Thank God for rhyme and rhythm. If Shakespeare had informed his Dark Lady that she was more beautiful than a summer’s day she would have probably asked him not to talk nonsense. But when he wrote,

‘Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate,’

she no doubt accepted the compliment gracefully. We are shy in prose. Verse allows us to indulge our sweet folly without being fools. So, Marjorie, I warn you beforehand, when you want to know what I think of you—don’t go to the words I speak but to those I sing. Everybody feels the necessity of being a poet when he is in love, and nobody feels that necessity so strongly as a poet!”

“Are you going to write me more poetry, Michael darling?”

“Marjorie darling—I am going to *be* a poet, now,” was his answer.

A month after their marriage, Marjorie and Michael went down to Slindon to see John clothed in the Franciscan habit. They traveled down together by train

to Arundel and walked, what was to Michael a familiar, road, to the friary. In the reception room for guests, a room which being just outside the inclosure of the cloister (though a part of the monastery building) women could enter, they dined.

The lay brother was exceedingly interested in Brother Gregory's wife, and, monk and all as he was, captivated by her sweetness. Afterwards when he saw Michael alone in the cloister as he was on his way to see the community gathered together in their common room for recreation the genial old friar expressed his approval to Michael. "You're a very lucky man if you only knew it, Brother Gregory—I mean Mr. Donovan. I couldn't have done better myself."

The novices of Michael's year had passed on to another house for their period of studies, but the priests were glad to see Michael, who entered their presence with some awkwardness to receive the banter he knew would come. They let him off chivalrously; because those who saw Mrs. Michael kneeling in the Church during Vespers (and without being stared at Marjorie was critically assized by the community) heartily approved Michael's choice.

At the close of Vespers came the clothing ceremony. To this, or to its first part, Marjorie could not be admitted, as it was held in the Chapter room, inside the enclosure; so she waited with her husband in the Church listening to the muffled chanting of the "*Veni Creator Spiritus*" coming from the monastery.

At last John appeared, habited now as a son of St. Francis, though the ends of a pair of gray flannel trousers still peeped out from the new friar's garb.

The procession passed up into the sanctuary, the monks taking their stalls and the Father Guardian a



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chair placed for him upon the altar. Through the rich red and gold and blue of the stained glass windows the sun streamed in, lighting up each square of the splendid mosaic of the floor, burnishing each brass candlestick to an incredible brightness. There was the world outside beautiful and benignant, trying to force its way into the cloister where ardent youth took upon itself poverty, chastity and obedience. "Beware! beware!" it called. "There is yet time!" But the neophyte heeded not. Kneeling before the Father Guardian he received the *asperges*. Then a clear resonant voice spoke its defiance to the pride of life: "In the world your name was John Bradley; in religion it shall be Brother Andrew." And the Superior gave him the welcoming pax in sign of his reception into the order.

There was no sentimentality in the ceremony, no doubt in John's heart, only a grave gladness. Marjorie's eyes were wet as she passed through the church porch, but they were full too of admiration for the brave and beautiful thing she had seen so simply and so solemnly performed.

"Michael," she said, crossing herself with holy water, "how wonderful the Catholic Church is . . . You and I . . . and John! What variety!"

Marjorie and Michael got back to Cobham by the last train, reaching their cottage, which they had occupied for the last two weeks, to find that the woman who came in each day to help with the house-work had thoughtfully made up a big bright log fire against their coming. Very cozy was this little home of theirs with the firelight mingling with lamplight, great shadows leaping across the carpet and throwing into sudden and high relief the furniture of the room. While Mar-

jorie went about to prepare a simple supper for her husband and herself, ham and tomatoes, and bread and cheese and beer in pewter flagons, Michael lay down upon the settee smoking and lost in reverie.

"What is it, old Michael?" asked Marjorie at last, her brief preparations completed.

"I was thinking, darling," he answered.

"About John?"

Michael nodded. Marjorie sat down beside him and tousled his hair, a favorite trick of hers. "Poor old Michael. Is he in one of his Brother Gregory moods?"

There was silence for a minute, then Michael put his arm round his wife and drew her down to his breast.

"My little Marjorie, what a wonderful thing God has given me in you! And yet, my dearest," he whispered, "it's rotten for you to have married a spoilt priest."

"Darling Michael!" she cried in expostulation, kissing him.

Michael went on again. "Of course I know it was not the will of God. 'Many are called but few are chosen.' But those who have been called but not chosen are never the same again. Ever afterwards they fear earthly happiness even while enjoying it. They partake of both worlds, and are not at home in either."

Marjorie stroked his face. "Michael, what a lucky thing for you that you married me," she said inconsequentially.

"Of course it's a lucky thing—but what makes you say so, Marjorie?"

"Because I am almost the only woman who would understand you, my Michael. I love you all the more for these queer moods."

"Yes, Marjorie," he replied, "and our love is a more beautiful thing because of it, because I tried to be a monk and failed. It can never now become an end in itself and so end itself. It never can satisfy itself and be tired."

"Don't you think that is always the danger of a great love, Michael? It becomes self-contained, separated from God. Our love for each other is a part of His because we consecrated it to Him. It is more secure because we hold it with a looser hand. A part of His love, my dearest, given by Him, a symbol of Infinite Love."

"My Marjorie," was all he said.

"Yes, Michael," she went on once more, after a pause. "I love you more than any woman in the whole earth loves her husband."

"And I love you as much, my Marjorie," Michael added.

"But because we love each other so much, we have been given a cross to bear with our love. That is a happiness that few want or understand. But without it love lacks its chief strength and loveliness . . . I am deeply thankful that you went through Slindon; that you kept your vow and never spoke for two years—not until you were sure of God's will."

"And that you kept a still more heroic silence all that time, dearest . . . It was worth waiting for—though we might have had one another long ago."

Michael kissed her cheek and continued, "John has sought love and has at last found it. I sought love, too, in a different way—sincerely—by running away from one love to find another. God has now given me back what I refused . . . Love is an Absolute—like beauty—though it takes many diverse forms. The

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mystic and the lover pursue the same end—the greatest good in the world.” (He spoke slowly, dreamily, as though he were unaware of her presence.) “The unattainable, hope . . . the divine adventure . . . the death that is perfected in desire.

THE END

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